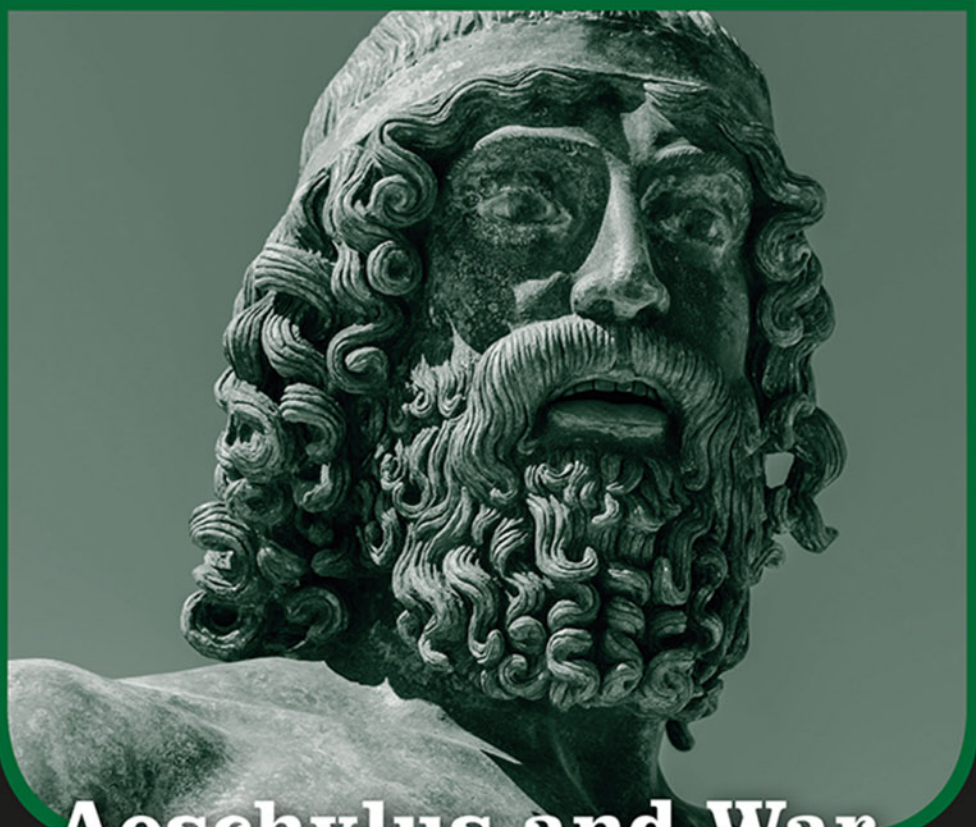




Aeschylus and War

Comparative Perspectives on Seven
Against Thebes

Edited by Isabelle Torrance

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Aeschylus and War

Comparative Perspectives on *Seven against Thebes*

Civil war, fratricide, a city under siege and women in mortal terror – these are the themes of Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*, a tragedy that Aeschylus himself (or at least his persona in Aristophanes’ comedy, *Frogs*) boasted was “full of Ares” or martial spirit. This volume takes account of recent research on ancient warfare and of the intimate connection between war and Greek tragedy, which continues to speak to veterans’ experiences today. The chapters bring important new perspectives to this undeservedly neglected masterpiece.

David Konstan, *Professor of Classics, New York University, USA*

This volume brings together a group of interdisciplinary experts who demonstrate that Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* is a text of continuing relevance and value for exploring ancient, contemporary and comparative issues of war and its attendant trauma. The volume features contributions from an international cast of experts, as well as a conversation with a retired US Army lieutenant colonel, giving her perspectives on the blending of reality and fiction in Aeschylus’ war tragedies and on the potential of Greek tragedy to speak to contemporary veterans. This book is a fascinating resource for anyone interested in Aeschylus, Greek tragedy and its reception and war literature.

Isabelle Torrance is Associate Professor and Research Fellow at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies. She has published numerous articles on Greek tragedy and its reception and is author of *Aeschylus: Seven against Thebes* (2007) and *Metapoetry in Euripides* (2013) and co-author of *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (2014).

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Aeschylus and War

Comparative Perspectives
on *Seven against Thebes*

Edited by Isabelle Torrance

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Sabine MacCormack**



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1 Aeschylus and war

Isabelle Torrance

All the surviving tragedies of Aeschylus deal with war and its aftermath. His *Persians*, first produced in 472 BCE, is famously our only surviving tragedy to dramatize a historical event, the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE.¹ His *Seven against Thebes* represents the siege of the city by an invading army and the development and conclusion of that mythological war. In his *Suppliant Women*, the king of Argos provokes a declaration of war from the Egyptians who arrive at his gates to retrieve the young women now under his protection. The *Oresteia* trilogy deals with the aftermath of the Trojan War in the first two plays. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is brought home by Agamemnon as a war captive, and he pays for his war crimes with his death. In the *Libation Bearers*, the chorus members refer to the capture and subjugation of their city (75–7), revealing their status as slaves through conquest. The final play of the trilogy, *Eumenides*, concludes with a new focus on a military alliance between Athens and Argos in a manner which evokes contemporary Athenian policy.² The title character in *Prometheus Bound*, attributed to Aeschylus, has been punished as a consequence of his perceived betrayal of Zeus following the war between the Olympians and the Titans.

We know that Aeschylus fought in the Persian wars, certainly at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, where he lost his brother Cynegirus (Hdt. 6.114), and probably also at Salamis and Plataea.³ Aeschylus' participation in the victory at Marathon was reportedly recorded on his epitaph,⁴ and his military record is rightly noted by scholars who have discussed his *Persians*. It is remarkable, however, that Aeschylus' personal experience of warfare does not feature in scholarship on his *Seven against Thebes*.⁵ Although the play dramatizes a mythological event, it nevertheless represents an experience that Aeschylus had lived through, namely the besieging of his native *polis*. Athens had been besieged by the Persians in 480 BCE, just thirteen years before the production of Aeschylus' *Seven* in 467 BCE. Herodotus tells us that most of the citizens had been evacuated to Salamis; the remaining citizens had barricaded themselves on the Acropolis and resisted Xerxes' forces for an impressive length of time, until some of Xerxes' soldiers managed to scale an unguarded cliff and gain entry into the Acropolis. When the Athenians saw that the Acropolis had been breached, some took refuge in the temple, but the Persians slaughtered them all and burned the buildings

(Hdt. 8.51–4). Soon thereafter the Athenian naval forces managed to defeat the Persians in the naval battle recounted in Aeschylus' *Persians*.

It was also the case that Athens and her allies had besieged Thebes in the aftermath of the Battle of Plataea in 479 BCE, when they had managed to repel the Persian forces decisively. Thebes had capitulated to the Persians during the Persian Wars and was besieged as retribution for failing to lend military assistance in the defence efforts. The allies' plan was to demand the surrender of all those who had gone over to the Persians, especially the chief leaders. However, the demand for the surrender of the traitors was refused by the Thebans, and the siege lasted twenty days until several Theban men of appropriate rank were handed over. According to Herodotus, these men assumed that they would be able to bribe the allies to secure their liberty, but the Spartan commander Pausanias, who feared as much, dismissed the confederate army and had the men executed (Hdt. 9.86–8).

It is not being claimed here that Aeschylus' *Seven* is in any way an allegorical representation of a historical event. Indeed, it is notoriously difficult to construe historical detail or accuracy from a literary text, as the case of Aeschylus' *Persians* makes clear. Although we know that it is based on a historical battle, the play contains fantastical dramatic elements, such as the conjuring of the ghost of the dead Persian king Darius, and typologies of tragic characters, such as the figure of Xerxes as a rash young man who learns too late through bitter experience.⁶ Nevertheless, Aeschylus' *Seven* is clearly a war play. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Aeschylus' character describes this play as being 'full of Ares' (1021), and in its limited reception history *Seven* has served as a powerful lens through which to examine internecine conflict in contemporary contexts.⁷ The purpose of the collection of papers presented here is to help us reframe our understanding of Aeschylus' *Seven* as a war play. Scholarship on *Seven* has frequently discussed the play's literary and artistic merit; these qualities are not in doubt.⁸ The intersection between real and imagined topography and material culture in *Seven* has been fruitfully examined by Daniel Berman.⁹ In this volume we take a new approach to the play. We investigate what Aeschylus' *Seven* can teach us about warfare, both ancient and modern, and about its attendant trauma. Key to this reappraisal is our recognition of the fact that the playwright Aeschylus was an experienced war veteran, as were many of the members of his audience.

In order to highlight this issue, we begin, in Part I: Modern perspectives, with the insights of a contemporary war veteran of considerable experience, Lieutenant Colonel Kristen Janowsky, who gives her responses to Aeschylus' *Seven* in a conversation moderated by Olivier Morel, experienced interviewer of war veterans and literature expert, and myself as a Classicist (Chapter 2). Notwithstanding the differences between contemporary and ancient warfare, such as the types of ammunition used or modern susceptibility to PTSD,¹⁰ figures like Jonathon Shay, Lawrence Tritle, Peter Meineck and Bryan Doerries have all demonstrated the value of comparative approaches to ancient Greek and modern warfare, particularly in the context of its attendant psychological trauma.¹¹ Indeed, both Tritle and Meineck discuss scientific evidence which shows that human responses to the stressors of war are biologically determined.¹² Janowsky's perspective gives us

insights into the possible effects of the play's events on an audience who had suffered and experienced siege warfare and had seen combat at close quarters, as the majority of Athenians had. Are Eteocles' actions as a military leader surprising? Are the fears of the chorus members justified? Does a warrior feel empathy for his or her victims, even after dehumanizing them? The answer to all these questions, Janowsky suggests, is yes; but the situation in *Seven against Thebes* is clearly unusual in purely military terms because the fate of the besieged city is inextricably tangled up in the fate of the cursed progeny of Oedipus. Nevertheless, the concept of a physiological element that takes over a warrior in combat, described by Janowsky, evokes the externalized force of the personified Curse in Aeschylus' *Seven*, which helps to guide Eteocles into battle (695–719).

The war dramatized in *Seven against Thebes* is between the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who is in control of the kingdom of Thebes, and the exiled brother Polyneices, who has made a powerful alliance with another Greek kingdom (Argos) and has raised an army to attack Thebes in the hope of regaining the throne. The action takes place in Thebes as Eteocles prepares the city's defences and a chorus of young women describes the terrifying experience of the siege, its sights and sounds, and imagines the traumatic fates that will befall them should the attackers prove victorious. In the long central scene of the play the shield emblem of each of the leading attackers posted to one of the seven gates is described to Eteocles, who interprets the symbol and attempts to counteract its negative omen for the Thebans by posting an appropriate defender at each gate. When it is revealed that his brother is stationed at the seventh gate, Eteocles selects himself as the appropriate opponent. The meaning and manifestation of Oedipus' curse on his sons, that a Scythian stranger would divide their inheritance, becomes clear: the Scythian stranger is the iron forged in Scythia with which they do battle (*Seven* 727–33; cf. 710–1). At the end of Aeschylus' tragedy the city is saved, but the princes, the sons of Oedipus, have died, slain by each other's hands. The death of the princes thus mires what should have been a time of celebration for the city's salvation, and lamentation over their dead bodies forms the focus of the play's conclusion.

The final portion of the transmitted text follows crudely the outline of Sophocles' later *Antigone*. A herald announces that Eteocles is to be buried with all honours, while Polyneices is to suffer the fate of a traitor and be left unburied. Antigone, their sister, announces her intention to defy the order and bury Polyneices' body. Most Anglophone scholars believe this appendage to be a spurious interpolation, for various reasons, including the fact that Antigone's presence is entirely unexpected in a play which apparently ends with the extinction of the line of Oedipus.¹³ Nevertheless, the figure of Antigone is significant in the reception history of Aeschylus' *Seven*. As Douglas Cairns discusses in the final chapter of this volume (Chapter 10), Sophocles' *Antigone* was undoubtedly influenced by *Seven*, and there is a sense in which the vast reception history of *Antigone*, arguably the most famous and most performed of all surviving Greek tragedies, is directly indebted to the relatively unknown and infrequently performed *Seven against Thebes*. In addressing Brecht's *Antigone* of 1948 as a case study in the reception history of both *Seven against*

Thebes and *Antigone*, Cairns demonstrates how these tragedies contain the potential for commenting directly on a contemporary and immediate context of war, in this instance the role of Germany in World War II. Like both ancient tragedies, Brecht's *Antigone*, as Cairns argues, has important things to say about the lack of connection between those in power and their people in times of war.

The character of Antigone also holds a starring role in Mario Martone's 1998 film *Teatro di Guerra* (literally *Theatre of War*), which charts the fortunes of an independent theatre company's rehearsals of *Seven against Thebes* as they prepare to bring their production to war-torn Sarajevo, as discussed in Chapter 3. Through its adaptation of Aeschylus' *Seven* the film asserts the enduring value of this play for a people under military siege, unfolding through two planes of political turmoil: the external Bosnian War and the internal violent besieging of ordinary civilians in Camorra-run Naples. Civilians, as Peter Meineck reminds us in Chapter 4, are always in danger of meeting their ends as 'collateral damage' in a war zone. In *Seven against Thebes*, the chorus of young women run a high risk of becoming collateral damage through enslavement rather than death, and they imagine violent rape along with the murders of infants and other atrocities should their city fall (321–68). After drawing attention to contemporary military attitudes to collateral damage, Meineck shows how Aeschylus in *Seven* brings to the fore the fate of non-combatants in a very striking manner. Meineck further seeks to understand how an Athenian slave-owning audience with military experience of both defensive and aggressive warfare would have responded to the fears of the chorus in a theatrical setting. He argues that the role of the chorus as potential collateral damage in *Seven* was designed to arouse empathy from the audience, implicitly corroborating Janowsky's assertions in Chapter 2 that war veterans write about war as a therapeutic activity and that warriors empathize with their enemies on a human level.

Political relations between Athens and Thebes were tense during the period in which Aeschylus wrote and produced his *Seven* due to the medizing of Thebes during the Persian Wars as outlined earlier. In Part II: Ancient perspectives, the significance of the city of Thebes and its relationship with Athens in the classical period represent a strong thematic thread across the chapters. In Chapter 5, Fernando Echeverría discusses the siege of Thebes from a classical Greek military perspective, mining the text of Aeschylus for information on siege warfare while also acknowledging the challenges posed by the fictional and literary nature of the siege described. Echeverría places the siege of Thebes within the broad context of historical siege warfare in classical Greece and argues that, along with certain military terminology recorded in Aeschylus' *Seven* for the first time in our sources, such as 'scaling ladder' and 'hoplite' (466), the crucial value of Aeschylus' text for a military historian is in the representation of the experience and trauma of siege warfare for a community under attack. In this respect Echeverría's analysis confirms the conclusions of many other contributions to this volume, especially those of Janowsky, Torrance, Meineck, Griffith and Cairns.

In Chapter 6, Lowell Edmunds argues that there are two faces to Aeschylus' Thebes, responding, in part, to Froma Zeitlin's influential proposition that Thebes

functioned as an anti-Athens on the Athenian stage.¹⁴ He demonstrates that the Thebes presented by Aeschylus has positive military values for an Athenian audience, evocative of the ideology associated with the Battle of Marathon in this period. At the same time Thebes has negative associations from its foundation myth related to Ares all the way through to Eteocles' omission of wives in his rallying call to the Thebans to defend their city, altars, children, and the Earth their mother (*Seven* 13–5). The curse on the sons of Oedipus disappears with their deaths, and mythological Thebes, along with its citizens, has the chance of a new start. The possibility of a new start, however, is overshadowed somewhat in the immediate conclusion of the play by the choral lamentation over the death of the Theban princes. Griffith argues, in Chapter 7, that the music and soundscape deployed in Aeschylus' *Seven* was a powerful tool for engaging the audience in a variety of subject positions related to the events unfolding on stage, causing them to empathize both with the frustrations and responsibilities of the young military leader Eteocles and with the terror of the chorus. Unlike other Greek war plays, or modern war songs and war film soundtracks, *Seven* eschews masculine militaristic music in favour of feminine forms of more varied lyrical expression, which dominate its soundscape and contrast with the constant iambic trimeters of the male characters. The musical strategies employed range from aural bombardment with short syllables to cadences of finality and doom to formalized lament. Paradoxically, it is through the female chorus in this play that warfare obtains representation on stage. Griffith shows, using evidence from Aristotle and a variety of Greek tragic texts, that music was not only a crucial component of Greek tragedy, but that its power to alter an audience's mood and influence their responses was (and remains) a key component in the affective value of the tragic experience.

Classical Thebes was, as Griffith points out, the epicentre of musical talent in the Greek world, and the musicians who performed the accompaniment to Greek tragic choruses would have come mainly from Thebes, perhaps an unwelcome reminder for Athenians of their own lack of prestige in this arena. In Chapter 8, Margaret Foster discusses the most celebrated Theban poet of the fifth century BCE, Pindar, and his representation of the Theban saga. In particular Foster focuses on the father–son relationship in the context of war, with emphasis on the Argive warrior-seer Amphiaraus, one of the Seven attackers, and his son Alcmaeon. As she observes, Amphiaraus, who had an oracular shrine at Thebes, is strangely removed from his genealogical connections in Aeschylus' *Seven*. His son Alcmaeon is never mentioned, nor his wife Eriphyle, who was instrumental in compelling Amphiaraus to take part in the expedition against his will.¹⁵ Alcmaeon would become one of the next generation of sons of the Seven, known as the Epigonoι, who attack and ultimately destroy Thebes. As Foster shows, the omissions surrounding Amphiaraus' family in *Seven* are striking in contrast to Pindar's treatment of Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon in *Pythian* 8, written in 446 BCE to celebrate the Aeginetan youth Aristomenes for his victory in the wrestling contest at the Pythian games. Pindar directly responds to Amphiaraus' characterization in *Seven* in composing his epinician. In his poem, aristocratic excellence, mantic ability and military prowess are reliably transferred from father to son, and

Amphiaraus is rehabilitated to the full glory of his epichoric oracle at Thebes, which Aeschylus refers to only elliptically.

If Aeschylus avoids overt acknowledgement of the destruction of Thebes in the subsequent generation and focuses on the salvation of the city at the end of the play, as discussed by Edmunds, this does not mean, as Sommerstein argues in Chapter 9, that he was unaware of the existence and significance of this established mythology. For the purposes of his trilogy, the extinction of the family line brings about the conclusion of Oedipus' curse on his sons, as Edmunds argues, and Thebes escapes destruction; but does this mean that the oracle of Apollo has been fulfilled? (The oracle received by Oedipus' father Laius stated that he must die without issue for his city to be saved.) Sommerstein suggests that, even as the chorus acknowledge the present salvation of Thebes, we, the audience, are prompted to remember its future destruction through a series of artfully crafted cues, including an interpretation of the oracle of Apollo according to which Thebes must be destroyed in order for the oracle to be fulfilled and a striking word play evoking the name of Eteocles' traditional son Laodamas.

The chapters by Sommerstein and Cairns form a concluding pair of discussions on the theme of the destruction of Thebes. Where Sommerstein focuses on the ancient mythological context of the known future destruction of Thebes, which, for an alert audience, means that the threat of the city's devastation by war remains at the end of the play, Cairns discusses a radical adaptation of the Theban saga, according to which the threat of destruction which looms over the end of Aeschylus' *Seven* and Sophocles' *Antigone* is enacted in Brecht's *Antigone* in a manner which refocuses audience attention more acutely on the twentieth-century context it evokes. Our collection of essays is thus framed by modern perspectives, with a central core of papers exploring a variety of ancient contexts which illuminates our main theme.

In a short piece recently published in the journal *Arion* and entitled 'Aeschylus Offers Paradigms for Today's Politics', Theodore Ziolkowski, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature at Princeton University, suggests that:

Perhaps, rather than restricting Aeschylus to humanities courses at our universities, we should put a good translation of his plays into the hands, or at least onto the night tables, of our political leaders, to be studied alongside the position papers prepared by their staffs. The sometimes-instant experts all too often neglect historical and psychological perspectives and consider nothing but the immediate situation or "deal." . . . Aeschylus understood long ago that today's politics results from underlying and long-standing issues of character, conviction, and personal ambition.¹⁶

As is often the case when it comes to discussions of Aeschylus, the *Seven against Thebes* gets no mention in Ziolkowski's piece, but it has been the aim of this volume to put that tragedy back on our political and sociological maps, both ancient and modern.

Notes

- 1 Historical events were rarely represented on stage in Greek tragedy, and the practice could be unpopular. When Aeschylus' older contemporary Phrynichus addressed the defeat of the Milesian Greeks by the Persians (in 494 BCE) in his tragedy *The Capture of Miletus* (produced c. 493–1 BCE), Herodotus reports, in a frequently quoted passage, that it provoked weeping in the audience, and he was fined 1,000 drachmas for reminding spectators of their own woes (Hdt. 6.21). Phrynichus later produced *Phoenician Women* in c. 476 BCE, which also dealt with the Greco-Persian wars but from the perspective of the defeated Persians. This play certainly influenced Aeschylus' *Persians*. For more information, see Hall 1996:14–15, Rosenbloom 2006:11–38, Sommerstein 2008:1–6, Garvie 2009:ix–xi.
- 2 For discussion see Podlecki 1999:94–100, Sommerstein 2010a:285–6, Torrance 2015b:291–4.
- 3 See Echeverría in this volume, 74–6, for an overview of what can be deduced from our evidence regarding Aeschylus' military service.
- 4 On the validity of the epitaph, see Sommerstein 2010b:195–201.
- 5 Even Rosenmeyer 1962, whose analysis of *Seven* is focused on the fact that the drama is a 'tragedy of war', does not mention Aeschylus' military experience. A rare exception is Gaca 2015:289, who references Aeschylus' military experience in her brief discussion of *Seven* within the broader context of the rape of women and girls in ancient warfare.
- 6 On the complexities and tensions between the 'historical' and the 'dramatic' in *Persians*, see Pelling 1997, Harrison 2000:25–30, Rosenbloom 2006:139–48, Garvie 2009:xi–xvi.
- 7 On the Aristophanic description of *Seven*, see Edmunds 94–5 and Griffith 116–20 in this volume. For a discussion of adaptations of *Seven*, see Torrance 2007:108–29, 2015a, and in this volume.
- 8 Among the most important studies of *Seven* are Bernadete 1967, 1968, Cameron 1971, Thalmann 1978, Winington-Ingram 1983:16–54, Zeitlin 2009, Sommerstein 2010a:68–95; for an introductory overview and further bibliography, see Torrance 2007.
- 9 Berman 2007 and cf. Berman 2015:75–121.
- 10 Crowley 2014 argues, for example, that combat veterans in classical Greece were far less likely to experience PTSD than contemporary US veterans; cf. Melchior 2011 for a similar analysis relating to Roman soldiers, and see Crowley 2012 for a discussion of how Athenian hoplites were psychologically equipped to deal with warfare. Shay 1994:39–68 also demonstrates that ancient Greek culture was better equipped than modern American culture in dealing with combat trauma through the communalization of grief for fallen comrades.
- 11 Shay 1994, 2002, Tritle 2000, 2004, 2014, Meineck 2009, 2012, and in this volume, Doerries 2015.
- 12 Tritle 2014 and Meineck in this volume.
- 13 This issue is discussed by Edmunds, 100–3, Griffith 117 with n.10 and Sommerstein 178–80 in this volume.
- 14 Zeitlin 1990a.
- 15 See Torrance 2014a:53–4.
- 16 Ziolkowski 2015:3–4. I am grateful to Ken Garcia for drawing my attention to this publication.



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Part I

Modern perspectives



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2 Aeschylus on war

A conversation with Lieutenant Colonel Kristen Janowsky

Moderated by Olivier Morel and Isabelle Torrance

Isabelle Torrance:

We are very grateful indeed to have Lieutenant Colonel Kristen Janowsky with us today, who served for almost thirty years in the US Army, and we are indebted to her for the time she has taken to think about Aeschylus and especially about his *Seven against Thebes*. Before we discuss the *Seven against Thebes*, though, I wanted to ask a more general question, if I may, which is something that has divided scholars of Greek tragedy about Aeschylus' war play *The Persians*. The play is about a historical naval battle, the Battle of Salamis, which is won by the Greeks, but the tragedy is described from the perspective of the defeated Persians. The Persian king Xerxes comes home in tatters. He explains how most of his men have died, either in the naval battle or on the way home through hunger and disease. The ghost of his father is raised from the dead during the play. That man Darius is the man against whose forces Aeschylus had fought in 490 BCE at the Battle of Marathon. The naval battle that is dramatized in the play took place in 480 BCE, and the production of the play was eight years later in 472 BCE. Scholars disagree about the purpose of this play. Some argue that it was written as a kind of triumphant victory celebration by Aeschylus about the victory over the defeated enemy, so that everyone could rally together and celebrate the defeat of the Persians, and one piece of evidence given in support of this is that the Greeks are described as singing a triumphant victory hymn as they go into battle (e.g. Hall 1996, Harrison 2000). The other scholarly argument is that this is a tragedy in which the Athenians, the Greeks, were meant to identify with the suffering of the tragic character and to consider the destructive nature of war in a general sense (e.g. Pelling 1997, Garvie 2009).

So my question is: is it possible that one of those views, from a military perspective, from someone who has experience of warfare, is more likely than the other, or are both views possible answers for why Aeschylus would write such a war play? And then a broader question would be – what pushes war veterans to write about their experiences whether in a fictionalized way or in a historical way?

LTC Janowsky:

From a modern perspective we always write after-action reports on battles, so there will be an accurate account and there will be a political account, and I'm sure that's always how it is. So you can glorify winning your battle, and say all the things you did great, and how you won, and let's make sure we always do it this way, and we are victors, and there's kind of a propaganda piece to that, and so you pass that on to motivate soldiers, and so there's that. The reality is that not all battles are perfect, ever, no matter what the strategy or technique, or after-action reports. It doesn't matter what you read, how much you study, or how many war plans you have, you always plan for what will go wrong.

So what makes veterans write about war? There are two pieces. There is the intellectual component so that you can explain what went right and learn from what went wrong, so that would be a command and strategic part of it. But then there are veterans, and it depends who is writing. A commander will write from a different perspective than soldiers do. Who is your audience? What is the purpose? Soldiers write therapeutically, but writing about war and what went wrong is not a great motivator. Lots of death and destruction does not motivate the next guy to want to participate and be the next to die. Of course there is also loyalism and nationalism that will motivate people. So the answer to your question is that it can be either, of course, it just depends on who the audience is.

Isabelle Torrance:

Do you think it's possible for someone who fought against a particular enemy to subsequently sympathize with that enemy?

LTC Janowsky:

Yes. Definitely. Because remember how close combat is in this timeframe. And now it's gone completely back around. Certainly, look at Iraq, which is my frame of reference, how close combat is. For the most part you saw who you were shooting at. So you know your enemy. In this timeframe, you know who you're killing, you see

them. And there are all kinds of movies made where, you know, you capture the prisoner and then you give them your last cigarette, because, you know, all of a sudden you realize it's the guy-next-door kind of thing. So yes, you definitely empathize with your enemy. Anyone who says different is not telling the truth. You realize that they are people and that they are human. So the question is why? Why would Aeschylus write a play sympathizing with the enemy? Could be a whole therapeutic thing. It could be a humanizing thing. We dehumanize war a lot. This is a way to humanize it.

Olivier Morel:

That reminds me that there is a creative writing group or association of former soldiers and many of them are women, which is also interesting, called Warrior Writers, here in the US¹ There's one famous example of the Warrior Writers, it's a woman named Robynn Murray who was featured in a documentary film entitled *Poster Girl* directed by Sara Nesson.² In this film she is seen writing about her experience as a warrior. She was a machine gunner, and she writes about that, and the film is about the very wide variety of feelings that she experiences when she thinks about what she has done in Iraq, and what she's doing when she writes about it, and especially her relationship with the so-called enemy. The reason I bring up the Warrior Writers is because I think it's very interesting when you speak about this discrepancy between what happened, between the events in which you're involved as a soldier, and then the need or the drive to write. Why is it important to write at some point, and perhaps also to write about this discrepancy? *Poster Girl* deals with this discrepancy between what you feel, what you witness in war, and what you have to reconstruct when you come back.

LTC Janowsky:

Well, you have to remember, unless you've been there, there's no real way to describe it. When you are in a situation of imminent death, people are shooting at you, or there are bombs, or mortar attacks, or whatever. In a combat situation where your adrenaline is flowing and there's total chaos around you, whether it's an ancient timeframe or current, your reaction and the decisions that you make are very different from the decisions you would make in a normal environment. Why do we train the military? Why do we simulate combat? Why do we try to get soldiers ready for war? Because I cannot describe to you with words, I cannot tell you how loud

it is, how much chaos, the dust, the smells, the sounds, the stress, I cannot describe to you the adrenaline and what's happening to your body. So there's a physiological 'thing' that is going on that for many, as you've read, takes over.³ People do crazy things in war, things that they wouldn't normally do. They shoot civilians, and all these other kinds of things. And you can almost look out afterwards, when you come back to your hooch and you smoke a cigarette, and everyone is standing around, and you're processing, it's almost like you are describing another era. I remember telling my son: 'I am living in a video game' (cf. Torrance, 40, in this volume). You see the kids playing *Call of Duty*, and that's how it is. It feels like you're living in a video game. And so there's no describing it. They can tell you all about the training, I mean I went to Fort Bragg and they shot live ammo overhead, and we crawled in mud, and we did all this, but there's no describing it unless you've been there. Thus the need for seasoned combat vets, who are the best trainers, and even those guys could say you've just got to do it, you've just got to be it, you just have to experience it. So there's a disassociation between the warrior and the person, always. I don't think that has ever changed, no matter what. And you can dissect it, and you can talk about it – we had a conversation over lunch about how you can be this soft-spoken regular person but then put that person in a gun truck with an M-50, and put a 'bad guy' in front of them, and they're a different person, and maybe not someone that they're proud of either. But survival instincts are different for everyone. Some people freeze, some people react, some people cower, some people go crazy. You don't know until you've been there. You can watch all the movies you want and think, 'God, I hope I'm that great hero who rushes and throws my body on the grenade and saves my whole platoon'. You really think about that and you hope you can do that but you really don't know, and in each situation you might react differently. In the first mortar attack, you might act this way, and then that experience becomes part of who you are, and now in the next event you act differently because now you've incorporated all these sights and sounds and smells, and so that builds on who you become as a soldier, as a warrior, whatever you want to call yourself. So over time, when you talk about guys who have been

in multiple wars and seen multiple instances of combat, there's a progression of yourself as a warrior, and that's true all through time. So with this processing, I can imagine that there was lots of introspection in antiquity also: 'What did I do?', 'How did I slice that guy's head off?', 'How did I watch this guy die?', 'How did I burn this village down?', 'What kind of person am I that I am capable of doing these things to other people, who are my age, who are younger, children, women?' War makes you really start to examine what kind of a person you are, and what motivates you to do these kinds of things, and it's not simply because you are told to. You could always walk away and say 'No, I'm not going to do that.'

Isabelle Torrance:

You mentioned so many things there that made me think of the *Seven against Thebes* and the last point about walking away reminds me of the chorus telling Eteocles not to go and fight his brother, which is one of the big questions of the play – why does he go? You mentioned the difference between someone who has experience of multiple wars, as Aeschylus would have had, and someone without that experience. That reminded me of an insightful question you posed when we spoke about this previously: what kind of military experience does Eteocles have? If we think about other mythological tragic heroes like Theseus or Heracles, they have several wars under their belts, but I couldn't find any evidence for Eteocles having previous military experience (and he is probably quite young, cf. Sommerstein 2010b:82–8). So if he's here with no military experience and there are various possible reactions that you mention, freezing, cowering, reacting, and going crazy, what was your sense of his response to the crisis in the play?

LTC Janowsky:

The first time I looked at this I thought Eteocles was a poor example of a leader, that was just my initial reaction. Why is the city not prepared? If I know I'm going to be attacked and I am the commander, for lack of a better word, the commander of my troops, and I know that I have seven gates to defend, then I have assigned defenders of those gates, and I have assigned back-up defenders of those gates, and I have a strategy and I have an escape plan. These things are planned out. This is what military strategists and commanders do. They don't wait till the last minute. I don't wait till my Scout comes in to describe the shield blazons, and then pray

to the gods and then decide ‘Ok you go’, and ‘You go’. That’s not efficient, and certainly commanders don’t go themselves, they don’t because who commands if you’re killed (see further pp. 20, 26–8)? That was my initial reaction to it, and then this chorus and his attitude towards women . . . I guess that is a whole other topic.

Isabelle Torrance:

Yes, an important one. But regarding one of the things you mention here about sending this guy off and then another, most scholars assume that the defenders were not on stage.⁴ In the text there is no indication of anyone on stage, although in some modern adaptations there are characters who are sent off, because if there’s nobody there, as you said to me in a previous conversation, who is he talking to? Who is he describing these shield symbols to? What’s the point if no military personnel is present?

LTC Janowsky:

Right. Well I don’t know enough about the staging, but it just seems to me basic common sense. I’ve already said, you have seven gates to defend, your defenders should be there. You can see them coming. You know they’re coming. That’s number one. Then there was a comment about him putting on his armour later, and so again commanders don’t actively engage in combat unless the city’s overrun and there’s no one left to fight and you’re the last man standing (see further pp. 20, 26–8). So that’s an issue. And then the chorus talk about the delay, is the delay that they’re worried that the gods aren’t responding to their prayers, or are they saying let’s get on with it here?

Isabelle Torrance:

So this is a passage towards the beginning of the play where the chorus come out with the garlands and fall upon the statues to pray for the salvation of the city, and they say ‘Why do we delay?’ (*Seven* 98–9). The literal context refers to delay in offering the garlands, but the way Kris had read it was, essentially, why are we, as a city, delaying in preparing our defences for war? This reading emphasizes that the action of the chorus in offering garlands is an attempt to defend the city by securing the support of the gods. There are also various stages at which the messenger comes in and he tells Eteocles what to do, giving him suggestions for modes of action, and Eteocles doesn’t do anything straightaway. So these were all issues that we had spoken about, regarding Eteocles’ slow response. But to come back to your point about his treatment of the women, I wanted to read the speech that Eteocles makes to the

women. These are young women who are terrified of the city being besieged and have come with offerings to pray for the city's salvation. Eteocles then addresses them as follows:

'I ask you, you insufferable creatures, is this the best policy, does it help save our city, does it give confidence to our beleaguered population, to fall down before the images of the city's gods and cry and howl in a way any sensible person would abhor? Whether in trouble or in welcome prosperity, may I not share my home with the female gender! When a woman is in the ascendant, her effrontery is impossible to live with; when she's frightened, she is an even greater menace to family and city. So now, with you running around in all directions like this, your clamour has spread panic and cowardice among the citizens; you are doing your very best to advance the cause of the enemy outside – the city is being sacked by its own people from within! Now then, if anyone fails to obey my command, whether a man or a woman or anything in between, a vote of death will be passed against them and there is no way they will escape execution by public stoning. Out-of-door affairs are the concern of men; women are not to offer opinions about them. Stay inside and do no harm!' [*Seven* 181–202, tr. Sommerstein]

So my question is, and this is another issue that scholars debate. Is Eteocles, in this military situation, being antagonized by the chorus? Does he have some legitimate reason for berating them, for telling them to go back inside? Is he justified in saying that they are causing panic among the citizens? Or is his behaviour excessive and possibly a sign of his own psychological problems? (See further Edmunds in this volume, 95–6, 105, on Eteocles and the chorus.)

LTC Janowsky:

This is what I wrote down as I'm trying to figure out what is the combat status here, and whether or not he is a good military leader: he calls the city 'beleaguered' and he says that they are spreading 'panic and cowardice' in the city. Is that true? Is there panic and cowardice in the city? Is the city overrun? There is no indication that the city's been overrun, or that anybody has entered any of the gates. So Eteocles sounds like he is panicking. None of this is what a good leader would do. A good leader is not going to stand there and threaten to execute his own citizens because he doesn't like these young

women being terrified of being raped and pillaged. If he had been doing something there would be no need for panic. So that's why I wonder if he's efficient. There's a reason that they're panicking.

Olivier Morel:

I would like to say about that, without at all being an expert, but when you referred to the chorus saying don't go to fight your brother, we are here at the heart of the tragedy, and I'm using the word 'tragedy', because if there's a meaning in this moment you describe of panic, of madness, of craziness, this is related to the fact that Eteocles is going to fight his own brother, a member of his own family. This is also connected with the history of paternity and maternity of Oedipus' sons, and we have Antigone's 'ghost' that haunts the play in this moment of panic because this is a tragedy of division. So the reason I mention that is because I think it goes back to what we said at the beginning when you were raising the question about dehumanization of the enemy. It is impossible to dehumanize your own brother, and here it questions the status of the metaphor, that is of writing, of the reconstruction of war after the end of a war, which is the situation in which the author finds himself as a war veteran. So there is a reconstruction of an event as a moment where the enemy is profoundly dehumanized while at the same time the enemy is your brother and potentially also your sister (Antigone). So my question is quite tangled, and perhaps it's more a comment. Between this chaotic power of war that is extremely loud and the pointed attempt to control this chaos there is this gap between the two poles in which I think gender is something that is, not by accident, something that Eteocles wants to repress. It has to be abstract, when of course, the entire play and the entire tragedy is about the family history and the tragedy of *philia*. So how did you read that, this moment where he represses the female component when precisely this is the moment of madness and of panic in the play?

LTC Janowsky:

His attitude towards the chorus, towards the women, I think it has more to do with the family history, I don't think it has to do with the military point of view. I think it's his attitude towards women based on the Curse, his whole history. I think that's a whole separate sub-line the way he treats women, the way he thinks of them, the way he talks to them obviously. Their concerns are real. If the city is taken over, the women will be raped,

sold as sex slaves. They have a real reason to panic because they see him not reacting, and he just dismisses it by telling them to go away and saying that they are being silly, but I think that has to do with his family history. I think we could call Freud in here and have all kinds of fun with that.

Isabelle Torrance:

Yes, and to come back to your point about the noises they describe. They describe noise, they see the dust. I couldn't find any references to smells, maybe that is because the war has just started, I don't know, but that's another question. At the beginning of the play we're told that the city has been besieged for some time, Eteocles says (*Seven* 22). We don't know how long. So again if it has been besieged for some time, why hasn't he done anything about it?

LTC Janowsky:

Well that is contributing to their panic. So if they have been looking over the walls for days seeing all this happening and there are dead bodies everywhere, there's the smell of rotting flesh and he's just standing around contemplating the shields and yelling at the women for being histrionic, then, of course, that's just going to feed the panic, especially when he says that if they continue this he is going to stone the general population. He's just not a very nice guy to begin with, and on top of that he is not a very prepared commander, but we don't know how much time has gone by. Typically, I think in that timeframe wars last some time. The invading army has to march. You're on a hill, you can see them coming. That takes some time. You see the horses coming. They have to get into battle positions. They assault the gates. It all takes time, throwing missiles. This is not something that happens quickly. Granted the play is a moment in time and we just don't know what that moment is, but certainly, as it's written, Eteocles takes time to assign defenders, and that is significant for some reason. Why wouldn't they already be assigned? And is it significant because now he takes the seventh gate to fight his brother? Is that why? Or is it significant because he hasn't done anything and he's waiting till the last minute and he's not a very good commander? Or is it significant because he is fulfilling a prophecy? But unless the city is overrun and unless there is no able man standing, there is no reason that a commander would himself go and fight at this point (see further pp. 20, 26–8). He chose to do that of his own free will to fulfil a destiny. I don't know why he did it.

Isabelle Torrance: It might be slightly different in Greek mythological terms where kings and commanders do seem to go into battle, but the fact that he specifically goes to fight his brother is nevertheless very anomalous. And as we are having this conversation, I remembered that Aeschylus actually lost his own brother at the Battle of Marathon, and I had never really made the connection between the fact that he wrote a play about a war between brothers as opposed to obviously himself and his brother fighting on the same side. But to come back to the point about the chorus women – in your opinion their panic is not overblown or unreasonable, you would say?

LTC Janowsky: Short of being there, I don't think so. Certainly you know what's going to happen to them if the city's overrun. But I don't know what their relationship was with him prior. It just seems to me that their panic is typical. He obviously does not know how to cope with it.

Isabelle Torrance: I'm interested in your point about freezing, and you mentioned the concept of time, and this was a point that Olivier had made in a previous conversation we had about the concept of time during war being different from the concept of time in the real world, and of course then the concept of time in a performance is again something that is completely different, and it does feel that there is this very protracted scene in the middle that takes up most of the play, and that is somehow excruciating if you are thinking about the defence of the city. Even in antiquity this scene was made fun of by Euripides, a subsequent playwright, who wrote a play dealing with the same story in which Eteocles says during his organization of the city's defences: 'It would be too time-consuming to tell you the name of each man while the enemy is encamped at our very walls' (*Phoenician Women* 751–2). So it does seem to have been a point of significance even in antiquity.

LTC Janowsky: Right, we talked about that. It seems irrelevant what the shields look like. So what? There are armed men at the gates and I need to defend. We can analyze these shields later for our after-action report. I need to react to this. The descriptions do seem relentless. I understand that there is a whole reference to the gods and this is how the play is written, but it really is a long period of time which, when I read it, contributes to the panic. Okay, let's get on with the war.

Olivier Morel:

Is it the fact that he is losing the sense of time because of this panic? If I have time to mention this, there is a great Shakespeare festival here at Notre Dame, and when you said that about this relationship to time, the time of the war, the time of the play, and maybe the time when the writer is writing, and the time that separates us from this play also, which is one of our points of discussion, it reminded me of this very famous sentence in *Hamlet*: ‘The time is out of joint’ (Act. 1, Scene 5). Is this moment of panic also a moment when you would say that time is out of joint? In other words, when you’re in a war as a soldier in a situation of total emergency in a besieged city like that, what is your notion of time that is out of joint, that maybe triggers a need to reconstruct?

LTC Janowsky:

It depends on whether you’re acting or reacting. It depends on whether you’re engaged or not engaged. Eteocles does not strike me as being engaged, which means I think time for him is slower. If you’re engaged, time is quicker because you’re doing. He does not seem like he’s doing anything. He’s processing, he’s thinking. If you are doing things, getting your gear on, loading your weapon, you’re doing things, you’re being shot at, you’re running, time goes incredibly fast and you can’t even conceptualize how fast it goes. But if you’re waiting or not actively engaged in combat time is very slow. So I think you’re right, I think what’s interesting is the writer of the play’s timeframe. Why would he put this long protracted description? Is that a breather for him? Is he taking a step back? Is the process getting too intense for him as the writer? Is he inserting this scene as a break from the action that reminds him of his own military experience? Is this the writer’s PTSD that he’s processing?

Isabelle Torrance:

I wanted to ask about a line that I noticed and it struck me in connection with what’s going on in ancient Palmyra at the moment with the destruction of antiquities there. At one point the chorus say when they are terrified about the destruction of their city: ‘it is pitiful that so ancient a city should be cast down to Hades, the enslaved plunder of the spear, contemptuously ravaged and turned to flaky ashes’ (321–3, tr. Sommerstein). The notion of antiquity there, of being so ancient, seems particularly important, and the Greeks did seem to have some consciousness of how important antiquities were. They

LTC Janowsky:

admired the Egyptians, who had a much more ancient culture than their own. Is that something that is ever considered in warfare, would you say? Is it a point of consideration when cities or places that are perceived as ancient get destroyed, or is that not a concern at all? Maybe afterwards, but certainly not during. I don't think so, no. I wish I could give you a longer answer.

Isabelle Torrance:

Well let me ask you a different question. Olivier brought up the issue of not being able to dehumanize your brother as an enemy. That's really interesting because it does seem to me that during the course of the play there is some attempt at ideological distancing. So this is a Greek town, being besieged by other Greeks, but the attacking Greeks are described by the chorus at one point as an army of foreign speech (170), which, for the Greeks, was the main indicator of being a non-Greek. So the attackers are described as non-Greeks, even though they are Greek, and there are other details, for example one of the attackers is described as having barbarian-sounding horses (463–4), so again there is an association with foreignness. So how do you see the progression of this in the play? Do you think there is a sense in which this is a moment of realization for Eteocles, that there has been an attempt to create an ideological distance between the Thebans and the attackers which then implodes when Eteocles goes to fight his brother? Is the creation of ideological distance common in warfare?

LTC Janowsky:

Yes, definitely. You definitely dehumanize, you make up names, we did it in Vietnam, we do it in every war, where the bad guys have some kind of name. That, in theory, makes it easier to kill them. When you ask why he would purposely go to kill his brother, I think that whole distancing makes sense. They're trying to dehumanize the enemy, they're trying to say they're foreign, so that would make sense. But what doesn't make sense is that they're not actively engaged in battle. That's usually what it takes to live that denial. If I am a combat soldier or actively engaged in combat, and I create this mirage of a person so that I can justify killing them, I have to be actively engaged in combat to do that. I'm not going to sit back in an office and create this entity because I'm not out in the front lines. So Eteocles is not actively engaged. So he's hearing all this dehumanization, but he's not actively in touch with what's around him. I just don't know what he's doing. He's just not

with it, but maybe he never was with it. I mean let's look at his background. Maybe he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed to begin with, so that's why we have what we have.

Olivier Morel:

Well yes, I think it's also a very interesting question because we are mixing three different circles in the play, as far as I perceive it when I read the play. There's the family circle, there is a military circle in which they try to confront the chaos and violence that gives birth to societies or communities, human groups in general, there is the civic circle, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, what makes us a good citizen or a bad citizen, a good father and mother or a bad one, and this switch that you have to make when you are called off to war that you just described a few minutes ago, or when you have to be able to dehumanize the enemy in order to be able to do your job as a soldier, that suspends the law, which is a moral law also, of the city. So we have the family, the *genos*, the *polis*, the city, and we have the cosmic fight with the chaos of war, and so Eteocles is caught in the middle of three circles, in the middle of all the contradictions involved here. That's how I perceived it. What defines a Greek is also what defines the belonging to these groups, family, soldiers and citizens. How do you resolve this contradiction?

LTC Janowsky:

You could say that every soldier, and maybe police and any profession where you have to kill, probably has that same internal battle, because you are one person in your home and you are one person in your job and you are one person in society. And so then you have to take the pieces of each of those, and that in theory is what creates post-traumatic stress. So I've done this one thing, but the combat has become the bigger piece of the circle than my family and my friends, and so I have this bigger piece of the circle that is the 'killer' and it's overriding and creating all these moral and ethical dilemmas, and all this internal 'who am I?', 'how can I do this?', 'what kind of person does these things?' And of course that is your job but it's supposed to be a Venn diagram of sorts, right, where you have some equality in all these pieces in your life and then all of a sudden one piece has taken over, so how do you deal with it, how do you process it? Certainly people write to process, or they go to see a play, or they self-destruct, and it would appear that that may be the case here [with Eteocles]. There

was a self-destruction and a self-fulfilling prophecy of destruction.

Olivier Morel:

So in a sense you would say that the fact that Eteocles and his brother killed each other is a kind of self-destruction? So it is a kind of suicidal gesture.

LTC Janowsky:

Yes.

Isabelle Torrance:

It is presented that way in the play. There are a lot of Greek compounds that have the *auto-* root, which is quite difficult to translate in some of the passages but which expresses the fratricide as a kind of ‘suicide’, and there is the Greek grammatical form, the dual, used to describe an inseparable pair, that is used to describe the brothers (cf. Torrance 2007:31–2). So that is a really interesting point, that it’s almost like a suicide from Eteocles’ perspective.

LTC Janowsky:

Well you see that even today. Soldiers say they either reintegrate, they partially reintegrate, or they don’t, and then they kill themselves. So it’s what happens.

Olivier Morel:

It’s very interesting because I know a female veteran who was in Abu Ghraib and she is a police officer in Chicago, and one day she says there was a veteran who was in crisis during an intervention, and she’s a veteran and so she started talking to him, and guess what, he was pointing a gun at them and they were doing the same thing. They had a discussion, she the female veteran and this young man who was an Iraq war veteran with PTSD, and at some point he said, ‘I’m not going to kill you, this is suicide by cop’ which meant, ‘you are going to kill me.’ But it reminds me of the play in some way, what we say of the two brothers, which is probably the very essence of the tragedy, brothers killing each other.

Mark Griffith:

Just going back to the time issue – one of the confusing things about the play when you stop to read it, although it does not seem to be so confusing when you watch it, and this comes back to whether Eteocles is a good commander in chief or not: is that when he gives his speeches assigning the six different champions, Aeschylus has given him different tenses to use (cf. n.4). There are a couple of times where he says so-and-so ‘will do it’ or ‘I am appointing’ so-and-so, but there are a couple of times where he says so-and-so ‘has been sent’, and you can’t figure out from his text whether actually he did have all seven gates covered, and now this is the day that the bad guys have sworn their oath, they’re coming

for us now, and okay this shield can neutralize that shield because of the emblem on it, this guy matches this guy, all the gates are covered, and I'm the best guy to kill Polynices. He uses this wonderful word ἐνδικώτερος – who is 'better fitted', who is 'more exactly right'? – to kill Polynices but me? And everything falls into place, and he does succeed in defending the city. He does a really good job. Obviously there's all kinds of other horrible stuff that he does, like kill his brother, but it's very hard to figure whether it's sheer luck – he's sent seven guys there and 'good heavens' each one of the bad guys has come to just the gate where we can actually kill him – or whether he's picking them as he goes and with real skill getting his troops in exactly the right order, and himself, of course, he does kill nasty Polynices.

LTC Janowsky:

Yes, from a strict military perspective the mission was accomplished, it was a success, that's it. That's how the military would write it – successful mission. We won, you lost, we don't care how you got there. That's how things have been done, for a long time, but the road taken sometimes can be important. If you look at end state, though, you're right, it was a successful mission, therefore he is a successful commander.

Mark Griffith:

Yes, although in the other areas that we're talking about, clearly we cannot say that this guy made a success of his life.

Aubrey Crum:

Earlier at the very beginning of the talk you were comparing Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Seven against Thebes* and how the *Persians* can be read as humanizing or empathizing with the enemy, but can we really compare these given that one is familiar and the other is profoundly unfamiliar, and is it really easier to empathize with a stranger than with your brother?

Isabelle Torrance:

Well one of the points we have been making about Eteocles and his brother is how they are presented as a kind of interdependent unit at the end of the play, where brother killing brother is presented almost as a suicide.

Douglas Cairns:

There is an issue there, and it relates to something you were saying about dehumanizing the enemy and something Olivier was saying about being within or beyond the moral code, and I think the really striking thing is that it's both. So Eteocles and we presume also Polynices hate each other precisely because they were once so

close and they had certain expectations of each other. Each expected the other to behave in a certain way and they regard the other as being in breach of something, but it seems that that is always the case. So if you think of the example of the *Iliad*, you do have this utter dehumanization of the enemy to the extent that you regard the enemy as a piece of meat that you might actually eat, but at the same time you feel precisely that way because you think that this other human being has behaved in ways that you condemn. So there is a degree of being both within and beyond the moral code, and to some extent they are about different moral codes, but there's a conglomeration there where there's a definite oxymoron, there's a tension between regarding someone as completely beyond the pale, someone with whom you share no moral values, and someone you can regard as being in breach of moral values that you both share. I think that killing is such an abnormal moral value that you have to dehumanize, you have to create a reason to kill.

LTC Janowsky:

Douglas Cairns:

And that is a moralization, so that is the tension that I'm driving at. So even the dehumanization involves this moral rationalization.

LTC Janowsky:

Yes, it's a vicious circle.

Olivier Morel:

This is why it is *demoralizing* also.

Peter Meineck:

Just to pick up on the point about command, and the question about the ancient audience being able to see this in slightly different terms of a hoplite phalanx, that actually the commander standing in line battle is a noble thing to do. It's a strange army, these seven. On the one hand it's an aristocratic force but they are in a strange way acting like hoplites, and each of the shields is protecting one of the gates. I think of Cleon dying in battle as a hoplite, and Herodotus' description of the great debates about who is going to lead the Athenians at Marathon, and those commanders actually standing in line as hoplites. So I wonder whether in terms of the audience of antiquity, whether they would have interpreted his decision differently. In a way he was compelled to stand at a gate. Not to stand at a gate would have been seen as a cowardly action, and I wonder if that sort of changes slightly why he does it. He doesn't want to do it, but he feels that actually if I'm going to send other men to do this, I have to do it myself. Does that colour his decision?

- LTC Janowsky:* That would make him a pretty noble guy.
- Peter Meineck:* But in a reluctant way, right? I have always read it as he doesn't want to do it, but the pressure is such that he goes.
- Isabelle Torrance:* Because he waits to put himself at the seventh gate.
- LTC Janowsky:* My understanding is that you give the illusion of leading and then quietly duck to the back when the bullets start flying, theoretically.
- Mark Griffith:* There are a couple of lines, aren't there, when the chorus are saying don't do it, you don't have to do it, and he then does start talking about honour and valour, and how he can't back away (714–7). To be precise, the chorus suggest that 'God respects even a mean/cowardly victory (*nikēn kakēn*)', and Eteocles replies that 'a true guy, a hoplite (*andra hoplitēn*), shouldn't accept that kind of statement'. So he is judging himself by that hoplite soldier's standards. So that is one of the factors.
- Peter Meineck:* It makes his decision more tragic.
- Fernando Echeverría:* There is a passage in the *Iliad* also when Priam warns Hector not to fight Ajax but Hector does it anyway, for his honour. So leadership in ancient society is more this kind of charismatic leadership, not a really professionalized kind of leadership. The only way to get all those men behind you is to do the job yourself. Probably Alexander the Great is the quintessential leader in the ancient world, and we find more professional generals like Cesar doing this sort of thing at some point. If the legions are stuck, he leads the attack and turns the battle somehow. So Eteocles is definitely forced to go, but I would not say that he is willing. It is part of the ideology, part of the culture. He is expected to go.
- Douglas Cairns:* This is one of the criticisms that Achilles makes of Agamemnon, that he hangs back instead of fighting.
- David Hernandez:* One of the things about ancient culture is that people were steeped in military ideology from a very young age, so it was integrally tied to being a citizen. I mention this in terms of our discussion of the value system, in terms of thinking about the psychological experience of soldiers, in terms of interpreting behaviour; I think there needs to be a discussion about what the value system is for a highly militarized culture, a culture in which warfare is perennial, and where it is an integral part of education. So if you think about Hitler Youth or ISIS suicide bombers, their experiences in combat are

probably fundamentally different from an American who throughout their life did not really experience warfare but is trained intensely in a program and is then sent off to war.

LTC Janowsky:

I hear what you are saying. Your ethical dilemmas are different. When we had talked to children who lived in Iraq, their outlook on life was obviously very different and what they wanted and what they expected were different because they were used to war, and I remember thinking, ‘My God, how do these children survive?’, and I couldn’t even imagine my child coping in a place where you’re mortared and rocketed. And so you’re right. When you grow up in a militarized environment your psyche is different. But back then, I’m not an expert, but I think there was a warrior culture but there also was a class structure. Not everyone was destined to be a warrior. There were nobles and there were peasants. You probably lived with war all the time, people trying to take what was yours, but not everyone was going to be a warrior.

Mark Griffith:

This picks up on Peter’s point, I think, and David’s – the number of Athenian aristocrats, political leaders, who were killed in battle was high. There wasn’t anything like the same degree of disconnect between politicians and the army. The army was made up of the citizens who voted in the democracy and the officers were very often the very wealthy, the upper classes, but they had to fight next to them [the citizens] and be in ships with them, and quite a lot of them did get killed. This is how things are for most of the sixth and fifth centuries, but by the later fifth century, going into the fourth, this warrior culture is increasingly being challenged though not immediately replaced. It is being modified or complicated by other moral codes that are competing with it, so it’s not like it’s totally straightforward, but manliness – *aretē*, *andreia* – to prove you’re a real guy without ever going and fighting in battle, would have been an uphill struggle, much more so than in American society where there is no draft.

Isabelle Torrance:

Well that is really the point of this session. Obviously we have not had the opportunity to talk to someone from that kind of militarized society where people grow up from childhood with warfare, but we did have the opportunity to talk with Colonel Janowsky, which is at least one step closer for us in trying to understand what

were some of the issues that Aeschylus may have been processing when he was writing a play like this. And I wanted to note something very perceptive that Colonel Janowsky said previously, which was the possibility of writing to motivate future soldiers, because actually that is exactly what is said about the play by Aeschylus' character in Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs*. He boasts that all those who saw his *Seven against Thebes* would have been seized with a desire to be a warrior (1022). It is difficult to gauge the tone of this statement, and the god Dionysus says it was a bad thing that Aeschylus had done in making the Thebans [who were enemies of Athens] valiant in war, but even so it is significant that the concept of a 'recruitment play' is mentioned directly in connection with *Seven against Thebes*, although it is unlikely that it actually functioned as such (see further Griffith in this volume, 116–20).

Notes

- 1 See www.warriorwriters.org.
- 2 See www.warriorwriters.org/artists/robynn.html. Sara Nesson's film about Robynn Murray, *Poster Girl*, won the 2011 award for Best Short Documentary from the International Documentary Association and was nominated for a 2011 Academy Award for Best Short Documentary Film. For more information, see www.postergirlthemovie.com.
- 3 Compare this assessment of the experience of warfare with the driving force, the Erinys or Fury, that seemingly takes over and compels Eteocles into his decision to go to fight his brother in Aeschylus' *Seven*. See Torrance 2007:32–4 for a brief overview of the issue, with further references.
- 4 Scholars disagree as to whether or not Eteocles has already stationed some of the defenders before he describes the assignments. Taplin 1977:149–65 argued that Eteocles assigns the defenders one by one during the course of the scene, but Sommerstein 2010a:72–4, following Wilamowitz, focuses on the curious use of tenses in the scene, which implies that three positions have been assigned, three are assigned during the course of the scene, and one where a present tense is used can be understood either way. Cf. Torrance 2007:16–8.

3 Aeschylus, gangland Naples, and the Siege of Sarajevo

Mario Martone's *Teatro di Guerra*¹

Isabelle Torrance

Introduction

Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* is rarely performed, particularly in comparison with Sophocles' *Antigone*, with which it shares a significant overlap of mythological plot and several important themes (cf. Cairns in this volume). As Peter Meineck has noted, *Seven* is generally considered 'the most impenetrable . . . of all of Aeschylus' plays',² and the reasons for this are clearly connected to the importance of the choral songs and the significance of the long central shield scene, where shield blazons are described and interpreted. Both of these aspects of the play have the potential to alienate a modern audience. Nevertheless, there have been a handful of remarkable and innovative adaptations, which demonstrate that the tragedy retains its power to speak to contemporary society. The drama has been used for experimental purposes, as, for example in the German director Einar Schlee's 1986 *The Mothers* (*Die Mütter*), whose exploitation of the Chorus here became characteristic of his theatrical art,³ and a 2001 production at La Mama Experimental Theatre Company in New York which included a cast of numerous different nationalities and a giant puppet hand, typical of director Ellen Stewart's theatre.⁴ Two further powerful adaptations cast the tragedy against the backdrop of a contemporary civil or gangland war. In 1968 the Cuban playwright Antón Arrufat used the drama to address the 1961 Bay of Pigs attack against Cuba led by US-based Cuban exiles, and the play was staged for the first time in Cuba in 2007.⁵ Meanwhile, in the US, American pioneer in the genre of hip-hop theatre Will Power had created a very different kind of performance piece, first developed in San Francisco in 2001 but which gained particular acclaim in New York in 2006, based on the Aeschylean play, entitled *The Seven*, that refocused the issue of the family curse through the lens of violent hip-hop culture.⁶ Mario Martone's adaptation is arguably the most remarkable of all. It addresses the civil war in former Yugoslavia through the Siege of Sarajevo, as well as the gangland violence in Naples, but it also uses the text of Aeschylus to explore the process of acting and the creation of performance pieces by including a narrative of rehearsals for an actual theatrical production through the medium of film.⁷

The Siege of Sarajevo

It was the Siege of Sarajevo in the early 1990s, the longest siege in modern military history, that made Neapolitan film and theatre director Mario Martone turn to Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* to address the war that he found himself observing from neighbouring Italy. The play spoke to Martone because it describes a siege and a fratricidal war, but also because it explores the suffering of the community under siege.⁸ For Martone, the concept for the film came first, but he realized that the theatrical rehearsals needed to be real, not simply imagined,⁹ and so the project resulted both in a theatrical performance, which ran in Naples in the Teatro Nuovo from December 19–26, 1996, and again from June 17–25, 1997, and in the film *Teatro di Guerra*, literally 'Theatre of War' but with the English title *Rehearsals for War*, which premiered at the Cannes film festival in 1998.

The subject matter of the film is loosely autobiographical. It follows the struggles of a director (Leo) to mount a production of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* with the plan of performing in the theatre of war-torn Sarajevo. The dangers involved in this endeavour are on the minds of the performers during the course of the film, and ultimately the trip has to be abandoned because Leo's Bosnian contact Jasmin has been killed by a grenade on his way to the theatre. This narrative runs somewhat parallel to Martone's own experience. He had initially attempted collaborating with Bosnian author Miljenko Jergović on a script for the film. Jergović was to have scripted the part for a Bosnian director who visits Naples to attend rehearsals. Italian author Fabrizia Ramondino, with whom Martone had co-authored the script for his 1992 film *Death of a Neapolitan Mathematician*, and who had written in depth about Sarajevo, was to be another collaborator.¹⁰ Martone followed a few of Ramondino's suggestions, including scenes from a rehearsal of *The Taming of the Shrew* and a Bosnian character who became the librarian in his film, Ms. Hamulić, but the collaboration with Ramondino ultimately went no further.¹¹ Martone travelled to Sarajevo in search of an actor who could play the part of the Bosnian director. The visit to Sarajevo marked him deeply, and he kept a diary recording the devastation and dire circumstances of the people.¹² Jergović, of course, did not die, but in the end he said he was not able to come to Naples, and Martone proceeded alone with the project.¹³ No reason was given for Jergović's decision, but the film offers an interesting reflection on the issue through the figure of Ms. Hamulić, who works at the library in Naples. When Leo confides in her that his theatrical contacts from Sarajevo are no longer willing to come to Naples even though he has secured permissions for them, she replies, 'Perhaps it is better for them not to leave Sarajevo.' 'But why?' asks Leo, 'They might not want to go back,' she says, and 'it is better for them not to be tempted.'¹⁴ This explanation dovetails with Martone's observations of feelings of suspicion among those who stayed in Sarajevo throughout the whole siege directed against those who had left.¹⁵

Although the awaited Bosnian director never comes and the troupe of Neapolitan actors never makes it to Sarajevo, the brief scenes in the library form an important point of contact between Naples and Sarajevo, not only through the Bosnian

librarian who happens to work there but also through the fact that Jasmin had sent Leo a piece of the library of Sarajevo in his last letter, symbolically wrapped in the polyurethane sheeting sent by the UN to Sarajevo to cover holes in the windows and used in the stage set for Martone's theatrical production (Fig. 3.11).¹⁶ On his own visit to Sarajevo, Martone had clearly been marked by the destruction of its library (Fig. 3.1)¹⁷ and by fact the that books were used as barricades and protection from grenades at the university (Fig. 3.2). Leo ceremoniously gives the



Figure 3.1 Sarajevo library destroyed; photo taken by Martone on his visit to Sarajevo, published in Martone (1998:81).

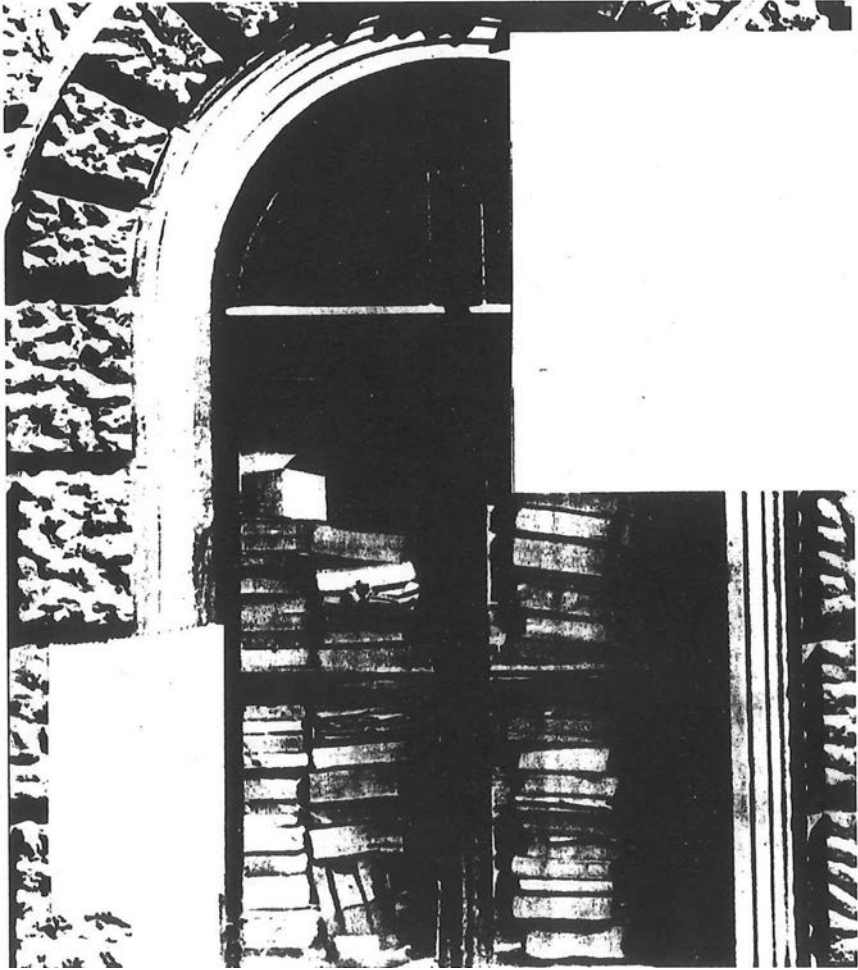


Figure 3.2 Image of photocopy given to Martone of a window in the Sarajevo library stacked with books to protect against grenades; published in Martone (1998:78).

fragment of the Sarajevo library to the Bosnian librarian in Naples after receiving it, but Leo's visits to the library also underline the fact that he is a deep thinker. He visits the library to borrow a book on anthropological rituals as part of his research for staging *Seven against Thebes*, and he is much concerned about the connection between the actors and the text of Aeschylus' play.

A second way in which Naples and Sarajevo are linked in the film is through music. Lucia, who plays one of the chorus members in Leo's play, also performs a raging hard punk performance at a rave approximately two thirds of the way through the film. The performance is entitled *Sarajevo Supermarket* and is

credited to Italian band Contropotere (literally, 'Counterpower'). The lyrics that we hear are as follows: 'Cross – rapes – torture – video – video agonies – video communications – video raids – video vampires – video executions – Jewish stars – red stars – stars and stripes – blue helmets – green helmets – sickle and hammers – black cross – hooked cross – Islamic cross – Christian cross – Sarajevo supermarket – Sarajevo supermarket'.¹⁸ These shockingly stark lyrics point to the commodification of violence and the embroilment of multiple races and creeds within that process. According to this song, what Sarajevo has to sell is political and religious warfare through the medium of video images. And there is a market for such images. War sells. In fact, Leo has been told by the local newspaper executive that they are not interested in reporting on his production unless there is wounding or bombing to report.¹⁹ The message of the song is one of sympathy for Sarajevo, reduced to the status of a supermarket for horror. In the final scenes of the film this message is reinforced in a different way, again through music. At the after-party of the final dress rehearsal, as they anticipate going to Sarajevo, the cast join in singing a Bosnian folk song, which they all seem to know, 'Ah Ljubav, Ljubav' ('Oh Love, Love') addressed to a lover, and this song carries over into the soundtrack while *The Taming of the Shrew* director discusses how Leo's production never made it to Sarajevo in the film's final scene. We have just seen a newspaper headline 'Bloodbath in Sarajevo' and the film ends by raising questions about what is really required in times of war.

Leo's inspiration for the rehearsals of his *Seven against Thebes* is certainly conceived with modern warfare in mind. Most of the rehearsals we see constitute a variety of different exercises designed to make the actors genuinely experience the terror of being blindfolded and having their senses assaulted by unexpected noises and encounters. Sound is a major focus of the theatrical production, as it is in the original,²⁰ but in a different way. The pounding of approaching cavalry is replaced with sounds of bombs and explosions created by Adriano the sound engineer. A further consideration for a modern adaptation is whether to cut the text of Aeschylus' play. In Leo's production this seems to happen in the end, but not without first exploring the full extent of Aeschylus' text. Martone was aware that the end of the transmitted text of Aeschylus' *Seven* in which Antigone appears is considered extraneous to the original, but he nevertheless chose to give Antigone a major role as leader of the chorus.²¹ This has an interesting effect since it creates a relationship between Antigone and Eteocles that does not exist in Greek tragedy, where Antigone's interactions are never with Eteocles but always with her father Oedipus or with the exiled brother Polynices. The presence of Antigone throughout the play in Martone's version generates great sympathy for Eteocles, and this is enhanced by the fact that Martone removes the lines in which Eteocles aggressively calls the chorus 'unspeakable creatures' (A. *Se.* 182) and accuses them of ruining the morale of those defending Thebes (A. *Se.* 191–4).

The lines from the end of the transmitted text of Aeschylus, in which Eteocles is to be buried with full honours, also occur in rehearsals featured early on in the film. This is important since Martone wants to create sympathy for those under siege. The actors in the production use modern costumes and props. Eteocles

broadcasts announcements to the people through a microphone, suggesting communication with the whole population (Fig. 3.3).²² In the film, the director Leo asks Giovanna, who is playing one of the chorus members, whether she thinks Eteocles was wrong in exiling Polynices, to which she responds, 'I didn't think so, I can't judge who did wrong. But seeing what came out of it. . . . No, I don't think – I don't know who was wrong.'²³ Her answer is equivocal, she is not sure,



Figure 3.3 Eteocles/Vittorio (played by Marco Baliani) addresses the citizens; photograph published in Martone (1998:83).

but she also says twice that she doesn't think Eteocles was wrong, thus creating further sympathy for his position. What she says is corroborated by Vittorio, the actor who plays Eteocles, and his understanding of the role: 'I didn't send Polynices into exile, I sent him away from the city because I knew his way of interpreting a city's political government would have been terrible for the city itself. What is happening is the sign of what Polynices would have done if he were to rule; the world is full of ambitious people, who always think about benefitting from circumstances, even Thebes is full of such people.'²⁴ So Martone's Eteocles did not exile Polynices for personal gain but in order to save the city. To further this theme, there is a very slight but effective adaptation of an original line from Aeschylus spoken by Eteocles when he goes to fight his brother. The Greek translates as 'The gain comes before the death that comes after' (A. *Se.* 697). Eteocles implies that he will profit from going to fight his brother. In Martone's adaptation, Eteocles says more straightforwardly, 'Better to die sooner rather than later',²⁵ and the body of Eteocles seems to be Martone's focus for the finale of the theatrical performance. He decides to use a real body rather than a dummy, inspired by an image of a dead soldier wrapped in a cloth from the conflict in Sarajevo (Figs. 3.4–3.6). It is only after this that it is decided to use a real body for Polynices also.²⁶ In the final scene of the play Antigone declares her intention to defy the order prohibiting the burial of Polynices. The Theban Polyphontes, played by Leo (who is also the director), aims his gun at her (Fig. 3.7), and all the men present then draw weapons at each other, some siding with Antigone, some declaring allegiance to their dead leader Eteocles. One major change made by Martone is to include the Theban defenders on stage and to give them lines from some of the choral odes.²⁷ A key line during the final scene is: 'A people that has escaped danger can be brutal', delivered in the transmitted text by the messenger to Antigone (A. *Se.* 1044) and in the film by Polyphontes to Antigone. It was a line that Martone made a particular note of in the diary he kept on his visit to Sarajevo.²⁸ The suffering is not over at the end of the play.

Modern costume and echoes of the war in Sarajevo are important for encouraging reflection on a contemporary situation, but the point of actually bringing this production to Sarajevo generates discussion during the film. Leo is challenged by Luisella, the actress originally cast to play Antigone. She doubts that they would be able to reach a theatre audience in Sarajevo with a production of Aeschylus' play in Italian. She accuses Leo of trying to suit his own interests. Leo stresses that it is about theatre, about connecting with Aeschylus' text and not about presuming to understand the experiences of the people of Sarajevo, but the conversation concludes at an impasse.²⁹ Soon thereafter Luisella is called to work on a movie in Rome and leaves Leo's production. She will be replaced by the higher-profile starlet Sara, who is in Naples for the production of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* but has had a tense relationship with the director Franco Turco, who seems to have control of all the funding for theatre in Naples and who is happy to pass her on to Leo. Franco and his production are presented as flashy and superficial compared with Leo's.³⁰ Franco is accused of wasting huge sums of money on props, and he has no interest in Sara's attempts to get into character as Kate to



Figure 3.4 Photograph by Danilo Krstanović in the exhibition catalogue *Sarajevo!* (Foundation Galleria Gottardo, Lugano, 1995), reprinted in Martone (1998:79) with the caption 'The deposition of Eteocles'.

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Figure 3.5 Deposition of the body of Eteocles in Martone's stage production; Martone (1998:101).



Figure 3.6 Antigone/Sara (played by Anna Bonaiuto) laments over the body of Eteocles; Martone (1998:103).



Figure 3.7 Polyphontes/Leo threatens Antigone/Sara; Martone (1998:111).

his Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, struggling to find reasons her character would want to marry him.

The choice of *The Taming of the Shrew* is an interesting one as a contrast for *Seven*, the former a comedy, generally deemed misogynistic in outlook by modern audiences, the latter a tragedy in which the misogyny of the main character of the original, Eteocles, is dissolved in the new adaptation both by the omission of negative lines and by the powerful performance of Antigone in a new role as chorus leader, played by the starlet rejected from *The Taming of the Shrew*. Leo's production, in contrast to Franco's, has no money at all and is entirely focused on connecting with the characters through Aeschylus' difficult text. Sara, a serious actress, who becomes increasingly invested in the challenging role of Antigone, can perhaps be seen to embody the grief of Sarajevo through her performance of the role, particularly given the suggestive nature of her name, Sara, the first half of the word 'Sarajevo'. The last words of the film go to Franco who discusses Leo's project in the final scene, and there is perhaps no small irony in the fact that Franco Turco (literally, the Turk, the centuries-old enemy of the Greek) reigns supreme in the Neapolitan theatrical arena over the materially impoverished but philosophically rich Greek tragedy. We have just seen Leo tell his actors, after the final rehearsal party, that they cannot go to Sarajevo after all. In the mirror scene, Franco and his actors celebrate their play over a dinner party and scramble to read reviews which praise the talent of Luisella, who had taken over the role of Kate, and the extravagant set. Only one member of the dinner party pauses over a

different page of the newspaper, whose headline reads 'Bloodbath in Sarajevo'. He asks Franco how it ended for 'those guys who wanted to go to Sarajevo'. Franco replies, 'And how was it supposed to end? They didn't go anywhere. These things are fanciful . . . they think they need theatre there, understand? Those poor people need weapons, is that clear? Weapons! What theatre?' 'But they didn't do their show then?' asks the man (Renzo), and Franco replies, 'I said: "Do it anyway . . ." they didn't want to.'³¹

The whole purpose of Leo's project was to perform in Sarajevo. According to the end of the film, Leo saw no point in staging the production in Naples, and Franco saw no point in staging it in Sarajevo. We know that Martone did stage his production of *Seven against Thebes* in Naples, twice, so there is a significant divergence here between the fictional Leo and Martone's own experience. Nevertheless, the abandonment of the performance in the film heightens the tension surrounding the question of theatre's value for a people at war. It was well publicized in the early 1990s that the American writer, theatre director, and political activist Susan Sontag had gone to Sarajevo to direct a Bosnian version of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.³² Indeed, during his own visit to Sarajevo, Martone had discovered that Sontag was staying in the same hotel and had left a message for her with her assistant, but, as he recorded starkly in his diary: 'Susan Sontag did not reply to my message.'³³ Sontag is also mentioned at the beginning of the film. When Leo seeks the support of a local newspaper to get a journalist on board in order to facilitate travel to Sarajevo, he is dismissed with the fact that the paper has already done an article about 'that American writer who went to work in the theatre at Sarajevo'. Leo has to remind them of her name.³⁴

Sontag's experiment, however, validates Leo's project in certain ways. In the piece she wrote on her return to the US, entitled 'Godot comes to Sarajevo', for the *New York Review of Books* in October 1993, she discusses the value of theatre in Sarajevo under siege. Sontag explains her choice of *Waiting for Godot*, as a play about waiting in vain for a people who felt that they too were waiting in vain for international intervention. Wasn't this insensitive or pessimistic? Sontag was asked. Her answer: 'In Sarajevo, as anywhere else, there are more than a few people who feel strengthened and consoled by having their sense of reality affirmed and transfigured by art.'³⁵ The talented actors who had remained in Sarajevo embraced the sense of normalcy afforded them by rehearsals and performance. 'Far from being frivolous to put on a play – this play or any other – it is a serious expression of normality.'³⁶ We might also compare the sentiment expressed towards the end of Martone's *Teatro di Guerra* diary: 'if you live as if you were in a movie, you do theatre as if you were living'.³⁷ On this analysis, theatre is an escape from surreal circumstances and can restore a person's sense of being alive. Sontag's production would pass Luisella's challenge of relevance in a way that Leo's does not, since it was performed by Bosnian actors in a Serbo-Croat translation. Nevertheless, the very fact of bringing a play to Sarajevo could also be read as an act of support for normality and morale among the besieged population, and the stress on connecting with the text of Aeschylus rather than trying to imagine the suffering of the people of Sarajevo would seem to be a secure avenue

for performance. Indeed Sontag reports that two out of the five theatres open before the war had stayed open, and two recent productions she mentions had been of Euripides' *Alcestis* and Sophocles' *Ajax*.³⁸ Greek tragedy, then, did have a place in war-torn Sarajevo.

Gangland Naples

As a result of not being able to travel, the film also gives us the sense that the actors are somehow trapped in Naples. The production's apparent failure in its overt aim serves a powerful function in reframing our focus on a different kind of warfare within the gangland culture of Naples. If the cast members of the play and of the film have no access to Sarajevo, they are completely embroiled in, or besieged by, we could say even, the everyday life of Naples and all the tensions and instabilities that entails.³⁹ The location of the theatre where rehearsals are taking place is in the Spanish Quarter of Naples, an area known for high unemployment, poverty, a particularly heavy Neapolitan dialect, traffic in heroin, and the strong influence of the Camorra, the large organized crime network based in Naples.⁴⁰ Throughout the film, many of the characters speak in Neapolitan dialect. The presence of the Camorra is felt early in the film when a young boss in the area, Silvano, pressures Leo to come back to his house for a beer. There are also tensions at the theatre. There is no money for the production. Leo manages to get hold of an old generator that he uses to simulate constant noise in the background of the actors' speeches. In one scene an older local woman complains about the noise and a young man becomes aggressive. A fight breaks out, but Silvano arrives and diffuses the situation. Sara, the actress who plays Antigone, approaches Maurizio, one of the other actors, to help her get some cocaine. He entrusts a third actor, Rosario, with the task, but Rosario is a recovering drug addict who ends up having a relapse.⁴¹ Rosario plays an invented Oedipus figure in the production, represented by his blindness coupled with a sense of foreknowledge,⁴² and it is interesting that he represents, in his real life, a person who struggles with the powerful force of drug addiction and seems to be losing the battle. One might say he seems 'cursed' by his addiction. Shortly after Rosario's drug relapse the gangster Silvano has an argument with another local mafioso over money. Silvano and his men threaten the mafioso at gunpoint and ensure that he leaves. A few scenes later, Silvano is ambushed by the same man and an accomplice on a scooter, shot five times, and killed. As a result of the murder and ensuing shakedown of the area, the police appear when the actors are on the street outside the theatre holding their fake guns rehearsing at nighttime. The police treat them as if they are holding real weapons, Leo gets frustrated, and he, together with Maurizio and Vittorio, ends up in police custody.

The incident is based on the actual experiences of the cast during rehearsals as reported in Martone's notes. The entry for the 11th of December 1996, which was shortly before the opening of the play, reads: 'We tried to practice once all the way from beginning to end, but we've been stopped by the police. The policemen stopped the actors on the street because they had weapons. They reported us for "causing alarm". One of the policemen said someone could have died, because he

would not have hesitated to open fire at the first suspicious movement . . . They wanted to confiscate the film [the incident was being filmed] . . . we gave them 10 meters of blank film.’⁴³ By translating and transposing these experiences of interrupted rehearsals to the film, by providing vignettes of everyday life in Naples, and by essentially mingling reality with fiction, Martone gives the film a fraught atmosphere and implicitly suggests that the ordinary people of Naples are being besieged and are at the mercy of a seriously defective political system.⁴⁴

In a bizarre coincidence, on the first day of Martone’s rehearsals for the theatrical production of *Seven against Thebes*, the 30th of October 1996, Venetian politician and sociologist Gianfranco Bettin was kidnapped by local gangsters and subjected to a false execution when an unloaded gun was pointed at his head and fired.⁴⁵ It was through one of Bettin’s books, Martone records in his work notes, where Bettin had described a reading of *Seven against Thebes* done in a small theatre of war-torn Sarajevo, that Martone had been inspired, and it was to Bettin in some ways that Martone owed his choice of text.⁴⁶ From its very conception, then, this project was closely tied both to the siege of Sarajevo and to Italian politics, and it makes sense that the film should reflect on the situation in Naples, Martone’s hometown, which features prominently in several of his films.⁴⁷ Naples is the focus, but Rome makes a brief appearance also when Diego goes to visit Luisella there. Together they admire an Etruscan relief at the National Etruscan Museum of the Villa Giulia (Fig. 3.8). The relief depicts a gruesome scene from the *Seven against Thebes* myth, one of



Figure 3.8 Etruscan Temple Relief from Pyrgi, c. 470 BCE, Villa Giulia, Rome, Tydeus eating the brain of Melanippus; photo: akg-images / Pirozzi (detail).

the most heinous atrocities recounted in classical mythology: the warrior Tydeus eating the brain of the Theban defender Melanippus.

The detail is one that does not occur in Aeschylus' play, presumably because Aeschylus wants to focus on the horror of the fratricides, but is known from other sources.⁴⁸ Luisella focuses on the beauty of the craftsmanship rather than the horror of the scene and then blithely talks about the director of the museum, who has invited her to his house on the beach in India. Martone seems to have included this scene to show that Luisella's conception of art is superficial. She does not recognize the symbolic nature of the image. Italian museums hold other representations of the Theban civil war. A second-century BCE funerary urn depicting the two dying brothers Eteocles and Polynices in the Archaeological Museum of Florence is just one example. It seems significant that Martone chooses an Etruscan image, specifically. Since the Etruscans were the ancient Italians, this suggests a national ownership of the most debased human behaviour of the Theban war that was purposely left out of the Greek tragedy, a reflection on the indignities inflicted by some Italians upon others within the film's Neapolitan context. Luisella had challenged Leo regarding his proposal to bring Aeschylus to Sarajevo, but she demonstrates little understanding of art and ends up playing Kate in the superficial production of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Human suffering

The recognition of human suffering is central, both to Aeschylus' play, where it is articulated especially through the chorus, and to Martone's adaptation, which is set in a hospital where wounded men are treated and women lament (Figs 3.9–3.11).



Figure 3.9 Wounded men being treated in the hospital on the set of Martone's theatrical production; Martone (1998:89).



Figure 3.10 Antigone laments on a hospital bed; Martone (1998:89).



Figure 3.11 Wounded soldiers and lamenting women, hospital set; UN polyurethane sheeting visible in background; Martone (1998:89).

The trauma of war-time injury is thus made into a focus point, and we are reminded of the potential for maiming when Riccardo goes to the hospital storage to get props and we see plastic limbs in addition to the hospital beds. Both Martone and Sontag mention the actor and director Nermin Tulić, who had lost his legs as a result of a bomb outside the theatre.⁴⁹ However, crucial to Martone's concept for the hospital, it seems, was Miljenko Jergović's description of someone from Sarajevo who has lived through the siege being 'like a seriously ill man in hospital' and 'like a virus-carrier'.⁵⁰ During his stay in Sarajevo, Martone found this virus metaphor to be quite common,⁵¹ and Leo (in the film) describes his Bosnian

contact Jasmin using the same expression.⁵² Sontag too spoke of the constant state of malnutrition and exhaustion of the people she encountered.⁵³

Sontag also stressed the secular aspect of Bosnian society and rejected inflammatory rhetoric of religiously motivated warfare during the siege.⁵⁴ Martone underlines this too. When Giovanna, one of the actresses playing a chorus member, asks Leo if Jasmin is an Islamic name, he replies, 'Yes, but they are as Islamic as we are Catholic',⁵⁵ and if we were in any doubt about how 'Catholic' this group of people is, we are shown the same Giovanna completely unable to answer basic questions on Christian conceptions of the nature of God during her university exams on moral philosophy.⁵⁶ Religion, then, is not a major issue in Martone's adaptation, although it does hover in the background. His chorus members pray to the gods as in the original, and one of the photos from the theatrical production shows that an image of Our Lady of the Sign was a part of the set (Fig. 3.12). War and trauma,

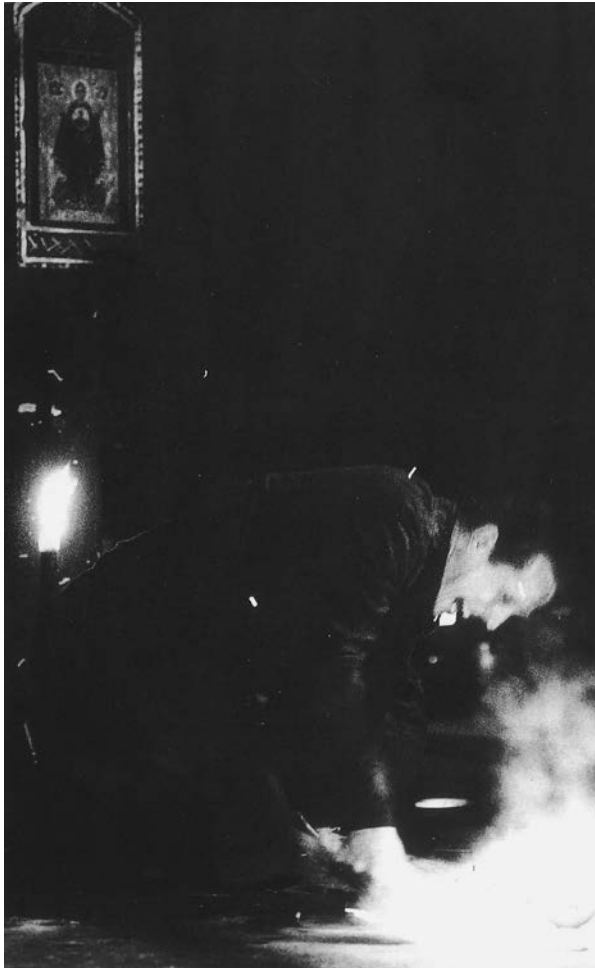


Figure 3.12 Our Lady of the Sign can clearly be seen as part of the set in this image from Martone's theatrical production; Martone (1998:92).

however, are major concerns both in relation to Sarajevo and in a different sense in relation to Naples, connected through the medium of Aeschylus' play. A dismal hospital scene in Naples, where the sound technician Adriano visits his father towards the end of the film, echoes the hospital of the theatrical set, and we are reminded once again of the dire living conditions for poor Neapolitans. As Adriano opens the window for his father, the 'view' that materializes is a concrete wall.

***Teatro di Guerra*, Italian cinema, and Greek tragedy**

Martone's *Teatro di Guerra* holds an important position within Italian cinema. It might be argued that his work influenced the more recent Neapolitan film *Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone in 2008, based on the book by Roberto Saviano, which details the horrors of living in Camorra-run Naples. Both Garrone and Martone owe a debt to Roberto Rossellini, the father of Italian realism, but *Teatro di Guerra* connects on a deeper level with certain features of Rossellini's work identified by Martone, such as the coexistence of both the secular and the religious, and a moral approach in which film functions as a vehicle for truth.⁵⁷ Thematically, *Teatro di Guerra* can be loosely aligned with films such as Pasolini's *Notes for an African Oresteia* (1970), which also seeks to appropriate Greek tragedy to a foreign contemporary context and encounters difficulties along the way.⁵⁸ Structurally we might compare Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* (1967), which operates within two contexts, one contemporary and one mythological, and which, like Martone's *Teatro di Guerra*, is vaguely autobiographical.⁵⁹ In Martone's film Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* operates on three different levels. The film engages directly with the ancient text, its mythological context, and its possible meanings. Ostensibly the tragedy is used to reflect on the contemporary and ongoing war in Sarajevo. Implicitly the exercise draws attention to the political crises within Neapolitan society and their impact on the daily lives of the ordinary people. As Alessandra Orsini has pointed out, the connection between the three cities – Thebes, Sarajevo, and Naples – is psychological rather than geographical.⁶⁰ However, it is through these three separate but intertwined narratives that Martone's film demonstrates how Greek tragedy as a genre and theatrical performance as a vehicle both have a powerful role to play in helping human beings to process and deal with contemporary warfare and its attendant trauma.

Notes

- 1 Many thanks and much gratitude are due to Giovanna di Martino, who was instrumental in helping me acquire a copy of Mario Martone's film *Teatro di Guerra*, and to Elisabetta Drudi for her invaluable assistance in translating Martone's recorded notes in *Teatro di Guerra: Un Diario*. The translated quotations from the script of *Teatro di Guerra* reproduced in this chapter are based on Elisabetta Drudi's work. This paper has also benefitted from the generous feedback of audiences at the University of Notre Dame and at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies. For advice on Italian cinema and several helpful suggestions on an earlier written draft, I am especially grateful to John Welle.

- 2 Meineck 2006:148.
- 3 Schleeß's *Die Mütter* combined Euripides' *Suppliant Women* with Aeschylus' *Seven*. See Fischer-Lichte 2004:355–9, Torrance 2007:127.
- 4 Di Martino 2014:158–9, 164–5.
- 5 See Torrance 2015a.
- 6 On Power's *The Seven*, see Meineck 2006:150–7, Foley 2012:104–7, Wetmore 2015.
- 7 This technique of including rehearsals for a stage production of Greek tragedy features in a number of films from different cinematic traditions, including Tyrone Guthrie's *Oedipus Rex*, Jules Dassin's *A Dream of Passion*, Babis Plaitakis' *The Summer of Medea*, and Werner Herzog's *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done?*, all discussed by Michelakis 2013:118–24.
- 8 Martone 1998:17, 19. On Greek tragedy as a source of inspiration in Martone's work, see esp. Orsini 2005 and cf. Vianello 2013 on his *Oedipus Rex*. Martone's theatrical productions of Greek tragedies include adaptations of *Philoctetes* (1987), *Persians* (1990), *Seven against Thebes* (1996), *Oedipus Rex* (2000), and *Oedipus at Colonus* (2004). In 2013 Martone directed Elsa Morante's 1968 *Serata a Colono* at the Teatro di Roma, an adaptation of *Oedipus of Colonus*.
- 9 Martone 1998:18.
- 10 Martone 1998:18.
- 11 Martone 1998:19.
- 12 The diary entries are published in Martone 1998:39–54.
- 13 Martone 1998:20.
- 14 Martone 1998:155–6. For ease of reference, all quotations from the film are referred to by the page numbers of the script printed in Martone 1998.
- 15 Cf. Martone 1998:46.
- 16 Martone 1998:167. Sontag 1993:56 describes using this sheeting to cover the front platform of her *Waiting for Godot* performed in Sarajevo during the siege.
- 17 Cf. Martone 1998:42–3.
- 18 Martone 1998:191.
- 19 Martone 1998:125–6.
- 20 On sound in Aeschylus' *Seven*, see Edmunds 2002 and Griffith in this volume.
- 21 Martone 1998:57–8.
- 22 Martone discusses how the technique of using microphones is akin to ancient masks, which amplified the voice at Martone 2004:208.
- 23 Martone 1998:195–6.
- 24 Martone 1998:194.
- 25 Martone 1998:208.
- 26 Martone 1998:79–80.
- 27 Arrufat also gave the Theban defenders speaking roles but did not assimilate them with the chorus in the same way; on this adaptation see further Torrance 2015a.
- 28 Martone 1998:47.
- 29 Martone 1998:151–4.
- 30 In this respect Leo's experience of theatrical production in Naples mirrors Martone's own, cf. Martone 2004:202.
- 31 Martone 1998:222.
- 32 Although, in the end, she staged only Act I (Sontag 1993:56).
- 33 Martone 1998:50.
- 34 Martone 1998:125–6.
- 35 Sontag 1993:52; cf. Eagleton 2003:23–40 on the value of tragic agony.
- 36 Sontag 1993:54.
- 37 Martone 1998:249, and see also Janowsky in this volume, who compares the experience of combat to the fiction of a video game (14).
- 38 Sontag 1993:52.

- 39 Loffreda 2012:48–51 notes that the city of Naples in this film is presented in a state of permanent instability and degradation. On the complexities of how organized crime blends into everyday life in Naples, see e.g. Pine 2012.
- 40 For an overview of organized crime networks in Naples, see Allum 2006.
- 41 Martone 1998:172–3.
- 42 Orsini 2005:89 treats this figure as Tiresias, but it is clear from Martone 1998:131 that this is meant to be Oedipus.
- 43 Martone 1998:77.
- 44 On the cinematic techniques used to deconstruct the boundaries between real life and fiction in *Teatro di Guerra*, see especially Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003:64–70.
- 45 The incident was reported by A. Gumbel in *The Independent*, published on the 12th of December 1996, as having happened ‘last month’, but Italian newspapers reported the event as having occurred on the 30th of October, see e.g. Pasqualetto 1996 for *Corriere Della Sera*.
- 46 Martone 1998:61.
- 47 E.g. *Death of a Neapolitan Mathematician* (1992), *Nasty Love* (1995), *The Vesuvians* (1997), in addition to *Rehearsals for War* (1998). For further discussion of Martone’s cinematic representations of Naples, see O’Healy 1999, Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003:51–72. Naples also features as the location of the death of the poet Giacomo Leopardi in the recent *Leopardi* (2014).
- 48 E.g. Pherekydes *FGrH* 3 F 97, and see Gantz 1993:518.
- 49 Sontag 1993:56, Martone 1998:44.
- 50 Martone 1998:40.
- 51 Martone 1998:46.
- 52 Martone 1998:147.
- 53 Sontag 1993:54, 56.
- 54 Sontag 1993:54.
- 55 Martone 1998:147–8.
- 56 For the script see Martone 1998:181–2.
- 57 Martone 2004:121–2.
- 58 This link is also made by Fusillo (2002:12). On Pasolini’s *Notes for an African Oresteia*, see Usher 2014.
- 59 Pasolini’s *Oedipus Rex* opens and closes with scenes set in contemporary Italy, while the main narrative of the film takes place in a mythological space. See Casarino 1992 for further discussion of the film. For Pasolini as an influence on Martone, see Martone 2004:171–5, 208.
- 60 Orsini 2005:98; cf. Dottorini 2013:126 on how the film deals with the invisible aspects of war.

4 Thebes as high-collateral-damage target

Moral accountability for killing in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*

Peter Meineck

When the city is captured
an evil operates,
takes human form,
spreads like smoke
down every street,
sickens with the kill frenzy
of Ares' pieties.

Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, 336–44 (Tr. John Tipton)

On the night of May 4, 2009, around 300 Taliban fighters launched an assault on Afghan police checkpoints in the area of the villages of Granai, Gangabad and Koujaha in Farah Province, Afghanistan. A force of US Marines and Afghan National Army soldiers engaged the Taliban, and heavy ground fighting ensued for several hours. During that night a US B-1B bomber dropped five 500-pound bombs and three 2,000-pound bombs, destroying a mosque and several buildings in the villages. Accounts differ about the effect of these airstrikes, but all agree that a significant number of Afghan civilians were killed. The villagers produced evidence of the devastation by loading up the body parts of their dead relatives on carts and producing an extensive list of names. According to Afghan Human Rights Monitor, some 117, including 61 children, were killed, whereas Central Command (CENTCOM) published the number of 86 civilian casualties. A Pentagon spokesman implied that this might have been the result of the Taliban using the civilians as human shields.¹ Three months later, the senior American commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, attempted to mitigate these kinds of unintentional civilian casualties by issuing a new set of rules of engagement that stated, 'destroying a home or property jeopardizes the livelihood of an entire family – and creates more insurgents' and that 'large scale operations to kill or capture militants carry a significant risk of causing civilian casualties and collateral damage'.²

The mass and unintentional death of civilians in wartime is certainly not unique to the conflict in Afghanistan. It is a brutal reality of all wars ancient and modern. Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, produced in 467 BCE, places the plight

of civilians involved in a war at the centre of the play with a chorus of young Theban women fearing what will happen to them if their city falls. This is nothing less than death for their family members, rape, assault, separation, abduction and enslavement. What they fear is the practice of *andrapodismos* – the process of sorting, killing and enslaving a civilian population – not only a mythological trope but a very real facet of classical Greek warfare. The Athenians had also feared *andrapodismos* at the hands of the Persians a mere 13 years earlier, but they were also known to have inflicted these kinds of atrocities on their own enemies, including their fellow Greeks. Many of the people who had participated in this violence might well have been seated in the audience. How would people who had subjected civilian populations to deliberate systematic violence have responded to this play? Did Aeschylus intend his audience to feel empathy for the plight of the Theban women and question the ethics of their own military policies? What did the classical Athenians think about what we now call collateral damage, and did the concept even exist? How did a slave society, as Athens was, respond to portrayals of people about to be enslaved? To explore these questions, we will consider *Seven against Thebes* from the perspective of *andrapodismos*. To do this we will look at the audience and what we know of the conflicts they were involved in, examine Athenian slavery and what happened to civilians after a city was taken, weigh this up against the Athenian's own self-perpetuated image and conclude by briefly considering the role and effect of empathy in drama.

The term 'collateral damage' is defined by the US Department of Defense as 'unintentional or incidental injury or damage to persons or objects that would not be lawful military targets in the circumstances ruling at the time. Such damage is not unlawful so long as it is not excessive in light of the overall military advantage anticipated from the attack'.³ The term seems to have come into use as a euphemism for civilian casualties of war in Vietnam and became widespread during the Gulf War in 1991.⁴ Now the term is used by the Department of Defense and NATO forces as part of their guidelines for effective targeting called Collateral Damage Estimation and 'assists commanders in weighing risk against military necessity and in assessing proportionality within the framework of the military decision-making process'. Ultimately this methodology provides a rubric by which a commander ordering a drone, air or artillery strike can weigh up the military value of the target against the potential loss to civilian life and property.⁵ In this way the very idea of collateral damage is intended to mitigate the ethical and moral responsibilities about the inevitable harm that befalls non-combatants in war. These kinds of fraught mitigations are not too dissimilar to what we find in Thucydides' dramatizations of the Mytilene debate and the Melian dialogue and the plight of non-combatants in tragedy.

Andrapodismos

The political justification of war has always tended to diminish the effects of warfare on non-combatants such as women, children and the elderly. In 1974 the United Nations implemented the Declaration on the Protection of Women and

Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, which was specifically intended to end the 'suppression, aggression, colonialism, racism, alien domination and foreign subjugation' of women and children and to make countries take measures to end 'persecution, torture, punitive measures, degrading treatment and violence' as well as recognizing 'imprisonment, torture, shooting, mass arrests, collective punishment, destruction of dwellings, and forcible evictions' as criminal acts. Conway-Lanz has traced a common cultural thread embedded in several ethical and religious codes that mandated degrees of prohibition against harming non-combatant civilians, even suggesting that the ancient practice of enslavement 'may have been motivated by self-interest, but it has saved many from death'.⁶ The chorus in *Seven against Thebes* disagree with this rather benign view of slavery, singing that death would be better than enslavement (308). Actions that are now prohibited under a United Nations declaration and widely considered war crimes were practiced by soldiers in ancient Greece and openly discussed as instruments of punishment and intimidation against enemy states.

The chorus go into some detail as to what will happen to them if their city should fall to the oncoming Argive force. They sing of how their city will be reduced to ashes, of how they will be lead away as captives, the young and old stripped and dragged by their hair, of blood-stained babies snatched from their mothers' breasts and of the obliteration of 'human plunder' (321–32). This horrific description develops into an accurate and vivid description of the process of *andrapodismos*, what Gaca has called the 'systematic selection and abduction primarily of the desired and exploitable young women and children'. This means that those not considered profitable such as the elderly, infirm and the very young were killed or just left to die.⁷

Clearly, Aeschylus intended his audience to experience the anxiety, fear and sheer terror of the women of Thebes and in so doing creates very specific images of a sacked city and the *andrapodizing* of its entire population. Eteocles is a counterpoint to their expressions of terror, accusing the women of destabilizing the Theban war effort. Was Aeschylus offering criticism of *andrapodismos* as an instrument of Athenian military policy, or was the play intended to remind the audience of what could happen to their own families at the hands of an enemy? Did they empathize with the plight of the Theban women or recoil against the emotional instability of a traditional foe? What then was the Athenian view of civilian casualties: was there a concept of non-combatant loss somewhat akin to our 'collateral damage', or was the killing and enslavement of the elderly, women and children a normal expectation of warfare in classical Greece?

The audience

To begin to explore these questions we should first ask who was in the audience at the original performance of *Seven against Thebes* in Athens in the spring of 467 BCE. Roselli has argued that the fifth-century audience could have included women, the urban poor and even slaves, who gathered on the Acropolis hillside above the *theatron*. This assumes that all Athenian male citizens could attend the

dramatic festivals.⁸ This is a highly attractive theory, extending the idea of an entire society influenced and excited by the theatre. However, recent archaeological evidence suggests something quite different. The *theatron* erected over the enclosed Sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus was a wooden structure that seated around 5,000 people, and the area directly behind was occupied by several buildings and therefore not a usable space for an unofficial audience.⁹ This is a far cry from the theatre seating 16,000 built by Lycurgus in the later part of the fourth century – a semi-circular stone structure that along with Epidauros has seized the imaginations of scholars and the public alike. Yet even though a predominantly frontal wooden grandstand is not the grand edifice that was to come in the fourth century, a 5,000-seat venue is still a very large theatre space, even by modern standards, with West End and Broadway theatres being around 1,000 to 2,000 seats. A *theatron* for 5,000 is also not capable of accommodating the entire adult male population of Athens, so at first sight we might also rethink its impact as a ‘democratic space’. However, the Pnyx, where the Athenian assembly convened, had roughly the same capacity.¹⁰

We must also assume that this audience of 5,000 included a sizable contingent of non-Athenian dignitaries from allied states. By the mid-fifth century a decree from Brea orders the members of the Athenian league to appear at the Dionysia and participate in the festival’s opening parade.¹¹ Their presence in the audience at such a prominent and expensive (second only to the quadrennial Panathenaea) festival surely must have had an influence on the kind of material that was presented there and its cultural and political messaging. Though financed and organized by the Athenian state, the City Dionysia was certainly not an Athenian-only event. Then who were the Athenians in the audience? The evidence on the gender of the audience has been much discussed, but it leans to a conclusion that a state festival in 467 BCE must have been predominantly, if not entirely, male.¹² These men would have been the Athenian elite and the most politically engaged and culturally savvy of the entire Attic population. As all Athenian citizens were required to perform military service, the majority would have already gained considerable combat experience, mostly as hoplites and marines, perhaps some as rowers. Although the oarsmen were recruited from the Athenian working class, some would have held allotted positions in the state government and deme municipalities. This was only 23 years after the battle of Marathon, 13 after Salamis and Plataea and perhaps just a year or two after successful Athenian campaigns against Persian allies in Thrace and rebellious allies in the Aegean. As Shay has pointed out, Athenian drama was ‘theatre by combat veterans, for an audience of combat veterans, performed by combat veterans’.¹³ The audience was clearly comprised of men who had first-hand experience of war.

There can be no doubt that the events that surrounded the Persian invasion must have been prescient in the minds of these spectators. Herodotus tells us (8.40–1) that in 480 in the face of a massive Persian invasion, the majority of the population of Athens was evacuated to Troezen, Aegina or Salamis, their fate totally dependent on the battle of Salamis. The small number who chose to remain in the city mounted a spirited defence on the Acropolis, but after several days they were overrun. Herodotus tells us that many of these Athenians threw themselves from

the Acropolis rather than be captured. Those that remained as suppliants were slaughtered by the Persians, who then destroyed all the shrines and temples (8.53). When news of the sack of Athens reached the Pan-Hellenic naval forces gathered at Salamis a kind of panic ensued, and if not for the intervention of Themistocles the war might well have been lost there and then. After the Persian attack, Athens remained deserted for much of the following year until the Persian general Mar-donius moved down from his base in Boeotia and occupied it once again. At this point Herodotus implies that the entire population of Attica, not just Athens, fled to Salamis (9.6.1).

After the victories at Salamis and Plataea, Herodotus does not tell us when exactly the Athenians returned to their lands and how they set about rebuilding their city, but we cannot underestimate the psychological effect this would have had on the entire population. Apart from the shrines and statues on the Acropolis, which were levelled, we also do not know how much of the city was destroyed by Xerxes. Perhaps very little, as Herodotus tells us that when Mardonius reoccupied the city he left what he found intact. As for the destruction of the Acropolis shrines, we see no major rebuilding there for over 20 years, except the clearing of debris and the building of walls, until the erection of the large bronze statue of Athena Promachus in 458 BCE. The sacked archaic temple was never built over, and the remains of the column-drums and entablature of the newer temple of Athena, which was under construction when the Persians attacked, can still be seen today, as they were incorporated into the Acropolis walls – a constant reminder of the Persian desecration, what Ferrari has described as a ‘choreography of ruins’.¹⁴

In 467 BCE the audience for the Aeschylean trilogy that included *Seven against Thebes* were invited into the sanctuary of Dionysus Eleuthereus on the south-eastern slope of the Acropolis, directly under the scene of the Persian destruction. This impious scar on what Aeschylus described as ‘the eye of the land of Theseus’ (*Eumenides* 1025) has to be considered both a physical and psychological back-drop to the play itself. It was a vivid and constant reminder to the Athenians that they narrowly escaped *andrapodismos* at the hands of a barbarian invader.

The Athenians knew full well what it meant to be defeated by the Persians. The treatment of the vanquished population of Miletus in 494 BCE provided them with a real example of Persian aggression that they found profoundly disturbing. Herodotus has it that when Miletus fell all the men were executed, the temple of Didyma was plundered and burned and the land was divided up amongst the Persians and Carians. The women and boys of Miletus were sorted and enslaved and then sent to the city of Ampe on the coast of the Red Sea (6.19.3–4). We might further infer that the boys were castrated as implied by the Persian threats made before battle (6.9.4). The Athenians were sickened by this, not only because the Milesians were originally colonists from Athens (5.97.2) but also because of their own situation as supporters of the Ionian revolt against Persian power. Sometime after the event, perhaps only a year or two, the playwright Phrynichus presented a tragedy entitled *The Sack of Miletus*. Herodotus tells us that the audience ‘fell to tears’ and the Athenian state fined him 1,000 drachmas for ‘bringing to mind a calamity that affected them so personally’ (6.21.2). The Athenians were distraught,

not only at the fate of their Ionic cousins but because *andrapodismos* could also happen to them.

In *Seven against Thebes* the chorus of Theban women immediately express panic at the thought of the siege and fall of their city, exclamations that Eteocles finds subversive and damaging to his defence. This would have resonated with the Athenians, not only because of their experiences in the recent Persian Wars but also because by the 470s Athens was pursuing a new defensive policy. This was the start of the building of extensive fortifications, which became the Long Walls linking the city with the port of Piraeus, Athens' naval and commercial life line and Athens' sole bulwark against Spartan invasion in the Peloponnesian Wars to come. A play about the potential sufferings of a besieged civilian population and what would happen to them if their city fell looked back to the recent Athenian past and to the military strategies of the future.

The audience at war

So far we have contemplated how the Athenian audience might have responded to Aeschylus' chorus from the standpoint of their own anxieties about being defeated and subjected to *andrapodismos*. But it is also important to approach the play from another perspective – the fact that the Athenians also inflicted *andrapodismos* on some of their enemies and actively participated in killing, assaulting, separating and enslaving civilians. Gaca has pointed out that we still tend to 'selectively associate the practice of andrapodizing with barbarian hordes'. She goes on to explain that the Greeks became 'among the most proficient practitioners'.¹⁵ This included the Athenian audience of *Seven against Thebes*.

In a few short lines Thucydides (1.98.2–4) tells us that in the 470s, right around the time the play was first performed, the Athenians, many of whom must surely have been seated in the theatre, carried out a series of punitive campaigns against three cities that resulted in the andrapodization of their civilian populations. A force under the command of Cimon was initially operating in the north and defeated and andrapodized the city of Eion with its Persian garrison and Thracian population. Then they went on to andrapodize (Thucydides used the term twice in this section) Skyros, emptying it of its Dolopian population and colonizing the island with Greeks. Then the same forces were involved in war against the Euboean city of Carystus, which Thucydides said ended with 'surrender and conditions' (1.198.3) and against the Ionic island of Naxos, which had tried to leave the Delian League but was defeated and forced to re-join (1.98.4). We do not know the fate of the Naxians, the term for 'enslaved', *edoulōthē*, employed by Thucydides, could be implying political and military subjugation or that some form of partial *andrapodismos* took place. With this in mind, what did it mean that Aeschylus was presenting a mimetic and highly emotional account of *andrapodismos* to men who had actually carried it out?

Was *Seven against Thebes* a dramatic response to a facet of warfare that was hitherto a rare occurrence and regarded as extreme? If this was the case would some Athenians have had serious moral qualms about participating in such atrocities? Or

was the brutal killing, assault and enslavement of others a normal part of ancient warfare? The *andrapodismos* of Miletus seems to have been so shocking to the Athenians that it was influential in the Athenians' radical decision to evacuate their city and let it fall to the Persians. But it may not have been the fact that Miletus was andrapodized, rather that the Athenians felt they could be next. This is because, in certain circumstances, *andrapodismos* had long been practiced by the Greeks.

Slaves captured in war are found in Homer (e.g. *Iliad* 3.298–301), and this was certainly a Greek practice in the archaic period, although probably at a much lower and less systematic level. With that being said, Greeks did andrapodize other Greeks. For example, Herodotus tells of a Spartan assault on Tegea that happened around 560 BCE with the intention of andrapodizing the population. The Spartans were themselves defeated, enslaved and put to work in the Tegean fields (1.66.3–4). In the fifth century it seems as though it was more usual for Greek male prisoners to be ransomed for profit, and sometimes surviving civilian populations were allowed to leave and resettle elsewhere, such as the Euripos (Hdt. 5.77), Potidaea (Thuc. 2.70.3), Pylos (Thuc. 4.14.1) and Sphacteria (Thuc. 4.38.5). There was also a significant difference between men captured in battle and those who were captured after a siege. Rosivach has only found four instances in which Greek male combatants were enslaved by other Greeks after a regular battle in the entire fifth and fourth centuries.¹⁶ While *andrapodismos* certainly happened, it may not have been the norm, and Rosivach makes the important point that perhaps it was always shocking to the Greeks and is recorded in our sources as a result, skewing our understanding of its frequency.¹⁷

Thucydides offers several examples in which Athenian forces sacked Greek cities and carried out andrapodization during the Peloponnesian War. These include Torone in 422 – although the Peloponnesians were allowed to live, (5.3.4) – Scione in 421 (5.32.1), Hyccara in 415 (6.62.3) and of course Melos in 416 (5.116). These actions occurred later in the fifth century, and it might be argued that Athenian punitive policy towards rebellious allied cities or Greek enemies that refused to surrender hardened as a result of its own situation under a state of constant enemy siege. Certainly the Persian Wars increased the level of warfare practiced by the Greeks, and this spilled over into the Peloponnesian Wars. Aeschylus' father, living in sixth-century Athens, would never have known the kind of intensive, mass all or nothing warfare his son faced at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea. One example in Herodotus is how the Persians, after sacking a city, systematically rounded up civilians in hiding by having their troops link arms in long lines and sweep the countryside like a dragnet (6.31.2). The sheer numbers the Persians were able to enslave and how efficient they were at it may have been what motivated the Athenians to abandon their city. Therefore, the andrapodizing operations at Eion, Skyros, Carystus and Naxos probably represented a sharp increase in Athenian aggressiveness. *Seven against Thebes* could be commenting indirectly on these enslavement operations by confronting the audience with a view of the kind of people who would have been subjected to this horrific treatment.

As andrapodizations of civilian populations accelerated in the fifth and fourth centuries we find more ethical squeamishness about the practice of Greeks

enslaving Greeks. For example, Xenophon qualifies the practice by stating that it should only be done to an enemy that has committed a severe wrong (*Memorabilia* 4.2.15). The notion that it was justifiable to enslave one's enemies meant that it should never be done to one's friends or *philoï*. Yet this is exactly what is happening in *Seven against Thebes* – though the Argives are described as an army 'with an alien tongue' (170), they are nevertheless Greek and led by a Theban. When Eteocles announces his plans to fight his brother, the chorus recoils at the prospect but also comments on how the stain of killing between Thebans and Argives needs to be cathartically expiated (680–1). With this in mind, Naxos, an Ionic ally, although defeated, was spared by Cimon's Athenian forces in the 470s. Aristotle famously took this concept even further, arguing that Greeks, even if enemies, should never be enslaved. Instead slavery should only be inflicted on barbarians who were not used to the freedoms enjoyed by the Greeks (*Pol.* 7.1334a2–3). This attitude is also found in tragedy: in *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1400–1), the title character says, 'It is right that Greeks rule barbarians and not barbarians Greeks, mother, for the barbarian is a slavish thing while the Greeks are free people,' and in *Telephus* (719), 'shall we who are Greeks be slaves to barbarians?'¹⁸ This ethical code also had a particular bearing on how Thucydides described the decisions whether to andrapodize the former Athenian allies of Mytilene and Melos, as will be explored in what follows.

The fact that the Athenians also committed *andrapodismos* presents another important question: what was the relationship of the audience to the very people they had enslaved?

Athenian slavery

The main way in which enforced labor entered the Greek economy was via warfare, either directly or purchased from traders who had themselves obtained slaves from victorious armies outside of the Greek world. Did the audience members themselves return home to be served by people they themselves had andrapodized? A tragic analogy is Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax*: although she has had a son with Ajax and now holds a position of respect within his camp, she is a slave nevertheless. Furthermore, her own home and family were destroyed by Ajax himself. Whatever she may have made of her situation in the play, Tecmessa is a product of *andrapodismos* in that she witnessed immediate family members killed, was forcibly separated from her relatives by an enemy, then kidnapped, raped and enslaved. Did the Athenians also possess their own Tecmessas?

The number of slaves in Athens during the classical period is uncertain, but it is almost universally agreed that Athens would qualify as a large-scale slave system under Patterson's formula by having at least 15% of its total population enslaved.¹⁹ However, Cartledge estimates that in the fifth century there could have been as many as 100,000 slaves in Attica, or around 40% of the population.²⁰ These people worked in the mines, in manufacturing, agriculture and in the household. Yet not all Athenians owned slaves, certainly not the poor, as the cost of maintaining even one slave for a year would have been prohibitive for many ordinary Athenians.

Rihll estimates that less than 50% of Athenians owned slaves.²¹ Large numbers of slaves were owned by individuals such as Nicias, who had more than 1,000 slaves working the mines at Laurium, and the Athenian state employed a number of Scythian slaves as an urban police force.

Who were these slaves and where did they come from? Chattel slavery became widespread in Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries, as debt slavery had been mostly abolished, making it illegal to enslave a fellow citizen to work off any kind of debt. The increase in commercial activities and overseas trading plus the establishment of large operations like mining and quarrying led to a demand for slave labor to perform intensive, dangerous and monotonous manual work. Slaves were also needed to work as craftspeople and household servants. Most scholars are now of the opinion that the vast majority of slaves came from the fringes of the Greek world, the Black Sea, the Near East, the far north and to the west.²² Most slaves in Athens were therefore not ethnically Greek and would have been considered barbarian, and while it was not unheard of for Greek men to be enslaved, in Athens at least this seems to have been quite rare. For example, Braund points out that we know of no Greek among the thousands enslaved in the mines at Laurium.²³ But Greek women and children from a defeated city would not have been considered free citizens of that state in their own right, and once the men were killed or captured they would have been regarded as stateless. In the Greek social world this is closer to barbarian in status than Greek. The initial worth of captive women would have been carnal, and then their skills in textile production or other useful crafts practiced by the Greek *oikos* would have added value. The Theban women in *Seven against Thebes* are acutely aware of their sexual value as young, unmarried women and imagine how they will be stripped, dragged by the hair, broken like horses and forced into the beds of their captors (325–31).

If most of the slaves in Athens were ‘barbarian’, where then did these Greek women go once they were enslaved? Braund has described the classical Greek slave trade as an omnipresent and routine series of small-scale exchanges, made everywhere, by all manner of individuals.²⁴ Slavers would buy captives immediately after battles and also trade for barbarian slaves from the fringes of the Greek world who had themselves been taken in battle or sold into slavery for a variety of social and economic reasons. The women and children who survived *andrapodismos* would have been further split up and sold to individual slavers. Plunder taken from a captive city belonged to the army or state, and apart from official awards for individual acts of bravery or from instances when we are told men tried to keep sexual partners on campaign, it does not seem as if Athenians normally kept or sold captive civilians for their own personal profit.

We know of one notable exception to this. In Andocides’ speech against Alcibiades we hear that Alcibiades personally purchased a Melian woman from among the captives after he had participated in the vote to andrapodize the former allied state. He then brought her back to Athens and had a son with her. This is described as an unnatural act on a par with Aegisthus who was the offspring of the incest between Thyestes and his daughter. Alcibiades’ child was born to parents who were the deadliest of enemies: his father having committed a terrible atrocity and his

mother having suffered one (*Andocides* 4.22–3). The accusation goes on by asking how could this son become anything but a foe to Athens when his own father had enslaved his mother, killed her father and destroyed her home? Furthermore, the accuser then asks his audience how they are horrified by such things when they watch tragedy, but indifferent when they perceive them actually happening in real life. This accusation, though made in the later part of the fifth century, does provide a fascinating glimpse into contemporary attitudes to *andrapodismos*: that it was a brutal, even shameful act, and that it would not have been normal for Athenians to keep slave women from cities they themselves had sacked, let alone father a child with them.

If we have established that it was abnormal for Athenians to keep captive slave women from their own campaigns, we have also shown that many of them did house women and children as slaves that had been captured in foreign wars and traded elsewhere. But we are still no closer to knowing what happened to the Greek women and children who were enslaved. Rosivach argues that once these people lost their status as wives, mothers, sons and daughters they became ‘displaced persons’ and simply disappeared as part of any kind of legal, economic or social record, diminishing their ‘Greekness’, thereby making it easier for other Greeks to enslave them.²⁵

While the accusation against Alcibiades suggests that returning home with a captive woman from a battle was considered an extreme act of shamelessness, Greek women and children from other Greek wars could certainly have been sold to Athenian households. For example, Xenophon details that when Greek mercenaries were ordered to leave their captives so the army could move faster some tried to conceal and keep boys or women that they particularly desired (*Anabasis* 4.1.14). The normal expectation is that they would eventually sell these people as spoils as they did at Chrysopolis (6.638). So in fifth century Athenian terms, Agamemnon returning home after the Trojan War with Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* would have been viewed as excessive, and yet after watching the performance of *Seven against Thebes* the majority of audience members, though they probably did not keep slaves they had personally andrapodized, would nevertheless have returned home to be waited on by people who would have experienced the kind of deeply traumatic events depicted in the play.

Greek poetry was not silent about captive slave women. The *Iliad* itself begins with the violent rejection of a ransom from a father desperately seeking the return of his daughter captured in battle and devolves into a bitter argument between two Greek warlords over another enslaved young woman. Homer has several instances of war captives being enslaved in the household of the victor (such as *Iliad* 4.237–40; 9.593–4 and *Odyssey* 9.40–1), and they are a prominent motif in tragedy. In *Agamemnon* Aeschylus has Clytemnestra vividly describe women howling over their dead men and the victorious Greeks sleeping in captured Trojan homes (325–37). He also depicts the king returning to Argos with his own captive slave girl, Cassandra. Clytemnestra, as the mistress of the *oikos*, would have ultimately been responsible for overseeing the training and integration of new slaves into the household. She tells the petrified Cassandra that they have many slaves like her and

that even Heracles was once forced into slavery. She adds that if ‘Necessity decrees such a course’ it is far better to be taken to an aristocratic house where slavery has long been a practice than a place newly enriched as they ‘excessively punish their slaves’ (1039–47). However, Cassandra’s silence enrages Clytemnestra, who says ‘she has come from a city, just conquered, and she will not learn to bear the bridle, until her spirit has been broken in blood and sweat’ (1065–7).

In *Libation Bearers* Aeschylus presents a chorus of foreign women enslaved as domestics in the house of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (75–80). They sing:

The gods forced their fate on my city.
Destiny took me, from the home of my father
To lead this life of slavery.
The just and the unjust I must abide,
And force my will to master
The bitter hatred in my mind.

Additionally, of the fragments of Aeschylus’ lost plays, *Thracian Women* also seems to have had a chorus of captive women, and the chorus of *Phrygians* may have been slaves.

Besides Tecmessa in *Ajax*, Sophocles depicts captive slave women being led off after a campaign in *Women of Trachis*, and of his known fragments, slave women are found in *The Captive Women*, *Andromache* (possibly), *Eurypylos*, *Cassandra*, *The Laconian Women*, *Polyxena* and *Tereus* (possibly). Euripides deals directly with the effects of *andrapodismos* in three plays: *Trojan Women*, *Hecuba* and *Andromache*. In his *Heracles*, a hero returns, is sent insane and, in effect, andrapodizes his own home and family. The chorus of *Iphigenia in Tauris* had been deported from Delos, and the Spartan women in *Helen* are enslaved in Egypt. Of the fragments, captive women are found in *Melanippe Captive*, in the story of *Hypsipyle*, the chorus of *Phrixus* (possibly) and the chorus of *Phaethon*.²⁶ If captive Greek women and children were absorbed into the slave population and effectively disappeared, why then are they such a prevalent trope in tragedy? Before returning to this question in more detail a brief examination of what happened to the ‘non-marketable’ people caught up in Greek warfare and the instances of resistance can help shed light on just how horrific the processing of *andrapodismos* really was.

Infants, the elderly and civilian resistance

Xenophon provides us with an appalling glimpse of the fate of people deemed not worth transporting and selling in the *Anabasis*. There he details how his force of Greek mercenaries came across a bedraggled group of refugees described as ‘useless old men and women and a few cattle’ (6.3.22). They had been captured by the army, but now that their captors were on the move they had been left to fend for themselves on an exposed hillside. They inform Xenophon’s troops that both the Thracians and the other Greek force had departed. On hearing this Xenophon tells us that his men quickly packed up and left to reunite with their comrades. The

refugees are not mentioned again, and we have to assume they were once again abandoned and left on the hillside, most probably to die. Marketability was not the only criterion that decided the fate of civilians captured in war; they also had to be mobile and able to keep up with an army's baggage train. Xenophon details the considerable resources needed to maintain captives, and as a result they were sometimes let go (*Anabasis* 4.1.12–3). This would still present a life-threat for the very young and very old, who would normally be abandoned or killed and regarded as worthless once their city had been destroyed.

Women, children and the elderly were not always passive victims of ancient warfare. In addition to offering support during sieges and being behind the battle lines working on food production and other important logistical tasks, there are several examples where they actively participated in combat. Plutarch cites a number of such acts including the story of the Argive poet Telesilla, who was said to have organized the women of Argos against the Spartans after their men had all been killed. Telesilla armed the Argive women and manned the walls, and they beat off a Spartan attack, forcing them to withdraw (*Moralia* 245c–f and Pausanias 2.20). Also, Herodotus recounts how Athenian women exiled on Salamis in 480 killed the wife and children of Lycidas, an Athenian councillor who had suggested terms with the Persians and was himself stoned to death by the men (9.5.3). Women, children and the elderly are also described as throwing roof tiles down onto invaders, most famously King Pyrrhus, who was struck and killed by an elderly Argive woman.²⁷ Then there is, of course, the figure of Artemisia of Halicarnassus in Herodotus who commanded her own ships and advised Xerxes (7.99) and mythical accounts and material representations of the Amazon warrior women.

In Greek poetry elders were normally portrayed as physically unable to fight, although old Laertes famously dons his armour and comes out to defend Odysseus in Book 24 of the *Odyssey*, and the elderly Nestor remains on the battlefield at Troy in the *Iliad*, albeit with the support and protection of his sons. In tragedy, the old men of Argos in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* describe themselves as 'men without honor / our aging limbs incapable of service / left behind propped on sticks, our brittle bones as weak as children's / unfit to serve the god of war' (73–6). Yet at the end of the play they gather the strength to try to take on Aegisthus. In Euripides' *Heracles*, the chorus of Theban veterans is unable to fight the forces of the usurper Lycus and rage against their aged right hands lacking the strength they once had to wield a spear (270). In his *Children of Heracles* the elderly Iolaus dons ancient armour from the temple to enter the battle to defend his young charges. The servant begs him not to and tells him, 'the strength you once had, my friend, is no more' (688). But old Iolaus will not be dissuaded, and in a brilliant, poignant and almost comic scene, the servant carries the old man's armour into battle while the slow old man berates him for not moving quickly enough to join the fray.

There were also times when non-combatants took individual action in response to *andrapodismos*. Plutarch tells of the Theban woman Timocleia, who was raped during attack by the forces of Alexander the Great and struck back by killing her rapist. But as Loman has documented, we hear of more times when women

chose to kill their own children and commit suicide en masse rather than face *andrapodismos* at the hands of the enemy.²⁸

Like the elderly, infants, unable to transport themselves, were sometimes killed or just left to die. Greek poetry did not spare its audience from vivid descriptions of the effects of war on children. These include Agamemnon telling Menelaus in the *Iliad* that even unborn babies must be ripped from the wombs of their Trojan mothers and butchered (6.55–60) and the chorus of Theban women imagining ‘babies covered in blood’ ripped from their mother’s breasts (345–5). Euripides plays out the brutal death of Astyanax in *Trojan Women*, and the sacrifices of Iphigenia and Polyxena are tragic metaphors for the effects of warfare on the young. In *Heracles*, the titular hero slaughters his own children, yet it is important to recognize that Heracles is deluded in his madness and believes he has travelled to Mycenae and is killing the wife and children of his enemy Eurystheus. What then do we make of this? Was it ethically acceptable, even laudable in certain circumstances, to brutally slay the women and children of an enemy if it was felt they had committed a great wrong against you? If they were not killed, was it equally acceptable to rape them, break up their families and force them into slavery? Or were these kinds of actions perceived as born out of rage and anger and therefore disproportionate in terms of civilian deaths? The chorus of *Seven against Thebes* plead with Eteocles not to fight his brother, saying, ‘a savage desire eats away at you, drives you to murder, blood-sacrifice proscribed by divine law, whose only fruit is bitterness’ (692–3). Were they giving poetic voice to the kind of anger that produced Athenian violence against brother Greeks? What was the Athenian perspective on *andrapodismos*?

The Athenian perspective

We know next to nothing about the Athenian systematic local genocides carried out at Eion, Skyros, Carystus and Naxos around the time *Seven against Thebes* was produced. We do, however, have two famous accounts in Thucydides that shed some light on Athenian attitudes to *andrapodismos*: the debate over Mytilene (3.36–50) and the Melian Dialogue (5.84–116), both concerning allied states that tried to break away from the Athenian League. Melos was violently andrapodized in 415/16, whereas Mytilene was spared in 425, although the Athenians did take land and taxes. We will return to the decisions made over Mytilene a little later, as they reveal a good deal about the role of empathy in rhetoric, and by association in drama, as a persuasive political and ethical force. After another 10 years of war, Melos was not as fortunate as Mytilene, and the Athenians subjected the population to the full force of *andrapodismos* (5.116.4), even though some Melians had defected from the revolt and surrendered the city.

Bosworth has suggested that the actual population of the tiny island of Melos was relatively small and that some Melians were allowed to live, with only 500 settlers re-colonizing the island after the Athenian *andrapodismos*.²⁹ He also points out the physical constraints of conducting an organized massacre on a large scale and that carrying it out, even on a smaller community such as Melos, would leave

deep and damaging psychological wounds on those ordered to do the killing. The sack of Melos is often held up as an example of typical Greek conduct when a Greek city fell, but as Pritchett and Rosivach have shown, this was not the case.³⁰ Melos seems to have been subsequently regarded as an extreme act. Xenophon relates how after the serious naval defeat at Aegospotami the Athenians ‘thought they would suffer the same kind of fate they had imposed on the Melians’ (*Hellenica* 2.2.3), and in Andocides it is described as an atrocity (*Against Alcibiades* 4.22). Such actions, sanctioned by an Athenian population themselves enduring a long siege, were born out of a collective anger, a dangerous kind of emotional contagion that dehumanized the objects of that anger and placed Athenian *kleos* above any qualms about inflicting such a punishment on fellow Greeks. Melos represented a psychological existential threat for the Athenians: if a tiny city like Melos could defy Athens and survive, then what hope did Athens have against the Spartans? Even so, Thucydides’ dramatization of the dialogue between the Melian leadership and the Athenian ambassadors indicates an attempt to comprehend what was, in effect, a state-sanctioned atrocity.

This was not who the Athenians were, or at least how they liked to view themselves. They were the city that was ‘open to the world’ (Thucydides 2.29.1) and the defenders of suppliants and exiles, as frequently depicted on their tragic stage. In *Persians*, Aeschylus places the blame for the defeat of Xerxes’ army on the opposite of this policy – their sacking of Greek cities and the wanton desecration and destruction of sanctuaries and shrines (808–13); in *Eumenides* it is the vile primordial Furies that become the *Semnai Theai* and are incorporated within the ‘righteous land’ of Athens (805); in *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles depicts the mythical Athenian king Theseus as the receiver and defender of even the most cursed suppliants, such as the elderly Oedipus, wandering stateless with his daughter before finally being laid to rest in Athens. Euripides also offered an Athens that not only received suppliants, such as Heracles after he has slaughtered his own wife and children, but also is prepared to go to war to preserve the ethical codes of Greece. In the *Suppliant Women*, Theseus compels the impious Thebans to bury the Argive war dead, and in the *Children of Heracles*, Athens upholds its high ethical and religious values by harbouring the children of the dead hero and fighting off an Argive attack to protect them. Even Medea is offered refuge in Athens by king Aegeus, though he cannot know that she is planning to kill her children.

The festival of Dionysus was a large state event open to foreigners, particularly the allies, who from the mid-fifth century were required to attend the festival and join the Dionysian parade. This was a venue for the presentation of Athenian ideals that promoted the concept of a righteous land where the rights of the powerless were upheld. Tzanetou has called this a *topos* in Athenian civic ideology that was used to justify Athenian imperial designs.³¹ With this in mind, could the laments of the women of Thebes be regarded as a dramatic veiled threat – a mimetic treatment of what would befall a city whose leaders pursue unjust or bellicose policies, break oaths and ally themselves with a foreign aggressor? Or was it intended to offer the Athenians a view of the effects of their own military policies on civilians caught up in the clash of states – the spectacle of ancient collateral damage?

The play is set in Thebes, a place described by Zeitlin as ‘the anti-Athens’, a mythological city of tyrants where incest, parricide and fratricide run rife and an inter-generational curse cannot be assuaged by the judicial mechanisms of the *polis*.³² The real Thebes had sided with the Persians in the recent wars and became the staging area for Mardonius’ incursions into Athenian territory, including the second occupation of the city in 479. Thebes was a clear and present enemy. Also by the time of the play’s performance Athens had chosen to break away from the Hellenic League, formed in 481, and had severed diplomatic ties with Sparta. By the end of the 460s Athens was looking to Sparta’s arch regional enemy, Argos, for support and military aid. Aeschylus reflects this new alliance in *Eumenides* when Orestes pledges undying support between the two cities (762–74). *Seven against Thebes*, produced in 467, may well be already reflecting this important shift in political strategy. Perhaps this might explain why some six decades later, Aristophanes describes the work, perhaps facetiously, as the play that taught the Athenians to love war and make the Thebans seem courageous (*Frogs* 1022–6).

At the time of *Seven against Thebes* Athens was actively developing its hegemonic aspirations by shoring up its allies and severing its links with Sparta, all the while promoting a type of Athenian exceptionalism. We see this argument presented in Thucydides by Alcibiades during the Sicilian debate and, more specifically, in favour of *andrapodismos* by Cleon in the Mytilene debate and by the Athenian ambassadors in the Melian dialogue. The Athenians follow a doctrine that as their city bore the brunt of the Persian invasion and then led the Greeks to victory they had the right to dominate their allies in matters of military policy. This meant in effect that any wrong committed against Athens by anyone was viewed as a direct attack on Athens’ legitimacy and an insult to what they had endured. The Athenian self-exile and the enemy occupation of their homes fuelled a sense of existential threat that was deeply ingrained in the fifth-century Athenian psyche. While refugees on Salamis or at Troezen, they had known that other Greek cities had joined with the Persians and that their Peloponnesian allies were unreliable. After the Persian war, regional rivalries and resentments turned into open hostility. The Athenians felt they had to dominate or be dominated. The memory of the Persian invasion was everywhere in Athenian culture throughout the fifth century: as ruins made visible from every part of Athens, as an integral part of political discourse and deeply ingrained in the narratives of their drama.

Aeschylus, who had fought in the campaigns against Persia, dramatized the enemy defeat in *Persians*, and in the *Oresteia* he resolved a famous Peloponnesian myth of inter-generational violence by staging it before a prop statue of Athena. This reminded his audience of the evacuation of Athena’s small sacred cult statue, the *bretas*, during the invasion. In this way he set his play at the feet of Athena both mimetically and physically by also commemorating Pheidias’ brand new colossal bronze statue of Athena Promachus, the first monument erected on the Acropolis since the Persian destruction.³³

The Athenians knew that they narrowly escaped being andrapodized themselves, a process that would have been aided by the Greek states that went over to the Persians. It was under this mindset that Athenian troops carried out *andrapodismos*

against the civilian populations of Greek cities who they felt were betraying their defensive cause. Recent history shows us time and time again that when a community feels under threat, its people often sanction acts of violence against the perceived aggressor that might have seemed unthinkable in less threatening times. Whether it is the decision to drop massive destructive bombs on the civilian populations of Hiroshima, Nagasaki or Dresden in WWII, to carpet bomb the villages of Vietnam or launch airstrikes and deploy ground troops in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, the plight of civilians, or what we have come to call ‘collateral damage’, is often mitigated and even ignored by the overwhelming need to strike back. The threat is always existential, whether perceived by a population withstanding constant air raids themselves, thinking that their way of life is under threat or believing that a murderous terrorist action must be met with a massive display of force. Civilian deaths are distantly perceived as the inevitable cost of war.

It has tended to be the depiction of civilian casualties by artistic means that have forged empathetic links between the aggressor and the victims of that aggression. One can think of Walter Cronkite’s emotional reportage from Vietnam or Huynh Cong Ut’s iconic photo of a naked young girl reeling from the wounds of napalm. It has been harder to perceive the civilian deaths that have resulted from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but many veterans who served in those campaigns can give harrowing first-hand accounts of such carnage, and it has fallen to grassroots artistic organizations such as writing workshops and drama labs to start telling these stories.³⁴ Eventually these stories can rise up into the mainstream media. The American experience in Vietnam was first told mimetically in fringe theatres, clubs and poetry groups until morphing into mainstream dramatic works such as *Tracers* performed at the Public Theatre and Royal Court Theatre in the 1980s and films such as *Coming Home*, *The Dear Hunter* and *Born on the Fourth of July*.

Athenian drama may have been responding to issues that emerged from the constant wars of the fifth century. Shay has suggested that tragedy in particular may have offered a kind of cultural therapy for a society increasingly traumatized by the effects of war.³⁵ This was reflected materially in the establishment of the healing sanctuary of Asclepius adjacent to the theatre.³⁶ Tragedy seems acutely aware that the trauma of conflict and war is not limited to the battlefield but continues at home within the family and the wider community. Was then one of the functions of tragedy to create a sense of empathy for the victims of war? Is this what is happening in *Seven against Thebes*?

Empathy

Aristotle famously described *catharsis* as the eliciting of the senses of *eleos* and *phobos* in an audience by drama (*Poetics* 1449a).³⁷ What is usually translated as ‘pity and fear’ might be better served by the definition ‘empathy with’ and ‘fearing for’. ‘Empathy’ has become a fraught term in recent years and is sometimes described as ‘feeling with’ and set in a binary opposition to sympathy as ‘feeling for’. This is perhaps something of an over simplification of what goes on when an audience member is moved by the totality of a performance. Recent

neuroanatomical research into empathy suggests that there are two main empathetic neural pathways. The first is a basic emotional contagion system, whereby the affective states of others are 'mirrored' by subliminal micro-expressions of the recipient responding to the target, what is known as 'kinesthetic empathy'.³⁸ The Greek dramatic mask and the movements of the ancient actor's body and gestures actually heightened this process of autonomic emotional contagion.³⁹

The other empathetic pathway involves a cognitive understanding of another's perspective and utilizes the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, the temporoparietal junction and the medial temporal lobe in the processes of self-reflection and autobiographical memory, regions that have been shown to be necessary for cognitive (evaluative) empathy.⁴⁰ Although these neural systems appear to work independently, both can come into play in the processing of empathetic responses.

This hypothesis is supported by clinical practice in dance, music and drama therapies, where therapists and participants use mirroring techniques to gain a better understanding of another's psychological situation in order to inform and aid treatment. Closely related to the themes of ancient tragedy is the work of David Alan Harris, who has described a striking example of this empathetic process in practice in his account of his work with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone.⁴¹ Amongst many mirroring group exercises over time, each boy was asked to 'direct' scenes of his former life using the other boys. One 'little plot' (to borrow Aristotle's term describing proto-tragedy from *Poetics* 1449a 20–1) involved the boys playing their own victims, such as mothers who had their babies killed in front of them, and family members forced to watch relatives die.

By mirroring and then embodying their most traumatic memories of what they were forced to do when pressed into combat, they were able to begin to confront their own anger, guilt and sadness by performing the roles of those they had been forced to terrorize. At the end of the program the boys volunteered to present scenes about their wartime acts, as well as ones showing their own traumatic recruitment into the child army. These were performed for their community members, who had hitherto justifiably feared the presence of these young former child warriors, returning from such a brutal war. Harris reported that the performance in a festival environment caused a highly emotional response from the town's people, who acknowledged that the drama helped them to understand the trauma of those who had formerly traumatized them and facilitated the reestablishment of a sense of trust and community inclusiveness. This is a practical example of the kind of bilateral (automatic/evaluative) empathetic response that tragedy was also capable of effecting.

While we possess very little about the reception of tragedy from the classical period, what we do have tends to highlight its affective power. For example, in *Laws*, Plato tells us how tragic playwrights 'with words and rhythms and music of the most morbid kind work up the emotions of the audience to a tremendous pitch, and the prize is awarded to the chorus which succeeds best in making the community burst into tears' (800d–e). Aristotle noted that when people listen to emotional music they are 'thrown into a corresponding state of feeling, even apart from [the words, and by] the rhythms and tunes themselves.' He adds, 'When we listen to such mimetic sounds we change in our soul' (*Politics* 8.1340a13).

The choral songs of the Theban women can offer some clues as to whether these kinds of empathetic devices were at work in *Seven against Thebes*. Aeschylus assigned his choral entry song a distinctive metrical pattern (astrophic dochmiacs) that was often used to highlight moments of high emotionality and distress. Eteocles describes this as ‘howling and shrieking that sound-minded people despise’ (186). Then during the first episode while the chorus sing in more orderly strophic dochmiacs they are answered by Eteocles’ trimeters, creating two contrasting moods. These competing meters devolve into quick-fire stichomythia (single line answered by a single line) that heightens the opposition between Eteocles and the women. The chorus then sing their first *stasimon* in three strophic pairs that would have sounded very much like lamentation.

This music, accompanied by the strains of the aulos, would have elicited a deep emotional response from many in Aeschylus’ audience. The aulos was perceived as a foreign and otherworldly instrument; its alternative deep buzzing and shrill tones helped it pierce the large open-air theatre space and add another level of emotional intensity. Barker has written that ‘the music of the aulos was dramatic and emotional; it was versatile in mood and effect. Capable of blaring vigour, plangent lamentation or sensual suggestiveness’.⁴² Aristotle links the aulos and the exotic Phrygian mode of music with the performance of ‘poetry and all Bacchic performances and movement’ (by which he means theatrical music) and that both are ‘excitable and emotional’ (*Poetics* 8.1342b1–3).

The distinctive meter, musical form (now lost), dramatic vocalizations, vivid content and the otherworldly sound of the aulos unified with gestures of grief and supplication and the mutable emotional range of the tragic mask were all combined to create a highly emotional *mise-en-scène*. This powerful emotionality inherent in tragedy is reflected by Plato in the *Republic* when he says that audiences ‘give themselves up’ to tragedy, empathizing with the hero, taking his sufferings seriously, and praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way . . . whereas when something afflicts us in real life, the opposite is true and we pride ourselves on our ability to remain calm and endure (10.605c–e).⁴³

What Plato is articulating in this famous passage is the power of mimetic drama to induce empathy and emotion beyond one’s usual or expected attitude to a given situation. If we extrapolate this idea to the reception of the chorus of *Seven against Thebes* it could be understood that in a military context immediately after a battle the Athenian warrior would have objectified the civilian population as chattel to be abused, killed, assaulted and enslaved. Yet in a theatrical context the same man could come to empathize with the plight of a group of captive women even though they are presented as enemy (Theban) and ancient. Thus the binary opposition between the relative positions of Eteocles and the chorus is blurred and made far more complex and compelling. Brian Delate, a Vietnam veteran involved in Aquila Theatre’s *Warrior Chorus* public programme, described the contemplation of war via its mythic portrayals in drama as ‘helping members of a democracy become more literate about the effects of the wars they vote for’. Aeschylus may well have been trying to achieve the same kind of empathetic result.

Ancient collateral damage?

Andrapodismos is rightly shocking to us today. It reminds us of the Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* – military mobile units in WWII established to massacre civilian populations – or the brutal inter-tribal genocides in Rwanda in the 1990s. We are left with the question, did the Greeks ever perceive of war as a practice that did not involve civilian casualties, or was the death and enslavement of civilians regarded as inevitable and even politically and financially profitable? The Melian dialogue approaches *andrapodismos* as an instrument of psychological warfare intended to keep rebellious allies in line, and Xenophon's mercenary army certainly traded captives for supplies and remuneration. The Athenian slave society required human capital, much of it coming from warfare. Does this mean that there was no concept akin to our collateral damage and that every civilian casualty was fully intentional? I suggest that this was not in fact the case, and the fate of civilians, particularly fellow Greeks, actually weighed very heavily on the Athenians. In highlighting the plight of the Theban women in *Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus was using the device of mimetic empathy to question Athenian military actions and their recent use of *andrapodismos*, a subject Euripides will return to several times decades later. I conclude with two fifth-century examples that demonstrate this point and show how the Athenians could be made to feel empathy for civilians unintentionally caught up in warfare: the Mytilene debate in Thucydides and the Herald from Euripides' *Suppliant Women*.

During the Mytilene debate Cleon is pushing for the maximum penalty to be exacted on the Mytileneans for what he perceives as their treachery in going over to the enemy. The Athenian assembly had initially voted to authorize their general in the field, Paches, to andrapodize the entire state. Yet the next day many had a change of heart, believing that only the guilty should be punished not the majority of the people who had been implicated in the rebellion by an oligarchic entity. A special assembly meeting was then called to decide the matter. Cleon chastises the Athenians and states that 'democracy is incapable of empire' because of their 'change of mind' or 'repentance' (3.37.1). Cleon then warns the assembly not to be persuaded by rhetoricians nor allow compassion to rule their judgment – they should 'not be slaves to the pleasure of the ear', and they are acting more like the audience of a sophist than members of an assembly (3.38.7). For Cleon there were 'three failings most fatal to empire – compassion, sentiment, and indulgence' and empathy (*eleos*) should only be given to those who are capable of feeling empathy in return (3.49.2–3). Yet, Cleon was unsuccessful in persuading the Athenians, and the Mytilenean civilians were famously spared in the nick of time. Though Cleon's opponent, Diodotus, had been careful not to use empathy in his rebuttal of Cleon's proposal, it is clear that it played an important role in deciding the fate of the people of Mytilene. Plato echoes Cleon's complaints in *Laws*, stating that their political emotionality was a product of the theatre and disdainfully labelling them a *theatrocracy* (3.700–1). The Athenians could be moved to political action by the emotional appeal of a persuasive speaker or the mimetic empathy of the theatre.

The second example is a theatrical one, from Euripides' *Suppliants*, produced in the last quarter of the fifth century, at least 40 years after *Seven against Thebes*. The play returns to the same mythic material and focuses on what happened after the Argive invaders had been defeated by the Thebans. A chorus made up of the mothers of the Argive dead come to Athens as suppliants to beg Theseus to force the Thebans to allow them to bury their sons. Initially Theseus refuses to help, condemning the Argives for launching such a foolhardy and rash attack, but his mother, Aethra, after being moved by the powerful lament of the Argive women, persuades her son to act to preserve the customs of Greece and to avoid being called a coward in refusing the request of suppliants.

The final word in this essay goes to Euripides' Theban messenger, who provides us with a remarkable glimpse into a poet's attitude to war in the fifth century. This lends further credence to the idea that tragedy was presenting alternate perspectives to the Athenian people and asking them to empathize with the victims of war. What the tragic poets were trying to achieve was to 'raise death before the eyes' of the Athenians before they cast their votes and by means of mimetic empathy let them feel for the human collateral damage of their wars.

Whenever war
Comes up for the people's vote, no one counts on
His own death; each thinks the other man
Will suffer. But if death rose before your eyes
When you cast your vote, Greece in its craze for spears
Would not be destroyed in battle. All men know
Which of two words is better: between peace and war,
Which is evil and which is good, and how much more
Peace benefits humankind. She is most dear
To the Muses, hated by Vengeance. She loves
Strong children, she rejoices in wealth. But we
Choose war, in our evil and enslave the weak
Man lording it over man, town over town.

Tr. R. Warner & S. Scully, 470–82

Notes

- 1 Crawford 2013:12–22.
- 2 Reported in *The Telegraph*, 24th June 2010, Gen. David Petraeus to review 'courageous restraint' by Toby Harnden and Damien McElroy.
- 3 Department of Defense 2007:P. GL-6.
- 4 Hedges and Al-Arian 2009:xiii–xviii.
- 5 McNeal 2014:740–4.
- 6 Conway-Lanz 2013:3–4.
- 7 Gaca 2010:155.
- 8 Roselli 2011:63–86.
- 9 For the latest evidence see Papastamati-von Moock 2014.
- 10 I thank Kurt Raaflaub for pointing this out to me.
- 11 IG 1s 46.11–13. 446/5
- 12 For a survey of the scholarly opinion, see Roselli 2011:158–94.

- 13 Shay 2002:152–3.
- 14 Ferrari 2002:25.
- 15 Gaca 2010:158.
- 16 Rosivach 1999:137n.42.
- 17 Rosivach 1999:136n.32; see also Raaflaub 2014:15–46.
- 18 See also Euripides’ *Antiope* 218; Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.73 and Plato *Republic* 5.469b–70a.
- 19 Patterson 1982:353. On the uncertainty about numbers of slaves in classical Athens, see Scheidel 2008:105–26.
- 20 Cited by Rihll 2011:50.
- 21 Rihll 2011:48–50.
- 22 Garland 1987:7–21.
- 23 Braund 2011:116.
- 24 Braund 2011:113.
- 25 Rosivach 1999:136.
- 26 On the effects of war on women in tragedy, see Rabinowitz 2014:185–206.
- 27 Diodorus 15.83.3; Plutarch, *Pyrrhus* 34.2; Pausanias, 1.13.8. See Loman 2004:34–54.
- 28 Plutarch, *Moralia* 259d–260d; Polyaeus, 8.40; Alexander 12; Polybius, 21.38A.
- 29 Bosworth 2012:23.
- 30 Pritchett 1991:245–12; Rosivach 1999:130n.4.
- 31 Tzanetou 2012:1.
- 32 Zeitlin 1990a:167. Edmunds, in this volume, suggests in his conclusion that the curse in *Seven* has been left behind with the death of the brothers and that the focus on the *polis* at the play’s close indicates an abandonment of cyclical vengeance in favour of *polis* institutions.
- 33 Meineck 2013:161–80.
- 34 Such as Aquila Theatre’s *Warrior Chorus* program www.warriorchorus.org (accessed May 10, 2016). See also discussion with LTC Janowsky in this volume.
- 35 Shay 2002:153.
- 36 Mitchell-Boyask 2007:105–21.
- 37 Cairns 2015:75–94.
- 38 Calvo-Merino et al. 2008:911–22.
- 39 Meineck 2011:113–58.
- 40 Shamay-Tsoory et al. 2009:617–27.
- 41 Harris 2007:203–31.
- 42 Barker 1984:15–6.
- 43 For a more detailed discussion of music and soundscape in *Seven*, see Griffith in this volume.



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Part II

Ancient perspectives



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5 Greek armies against towns

Siege warfare and the *Seven against Thebes*¹

Fernando Echeverría

Introduction and terminology of siege warfare

In his *Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus develops the final episode of the dramatic story of Laius and his descendants: Eteocles and Polynices, Oedipus' twin sons, fight for the right to rule over Thebes and kill each other in the process. In the background of the tragic plot, an enemy army approaches the great city and storms the walls, eliciting panic in the population and prompting defensive measures by the king. Situating the tragic action in the context of an attack against a fortified town, Aeschylus incorporates in the first half of the play a wealth of scattered details and references, including brief descriptions, of what is commonly labelled 'siege warfare'. Those details include interesting novelties: for example, the first mention of scaling ladders in a military context and one of the very first references to the term 'hoplite' in Greek literature. They happen to be found in the same sentence (Se. 466). *Seven* could be then regarded as a potential source of information for military historians.

Most specialists, however, have simply ignored the play. True, some scattered elements are incidentally used by military historians,² but the general setting, development and outcome of the military action find no echo in modern reconstructions of ancient Greek warfare. *Seven* is a rather underused play, especially when compared to the extraordinary ubiquity of *Persians*, undoubtedly Aeschylus' most recurrent play among military historians. This academic ostracism is based, it must be said, on reasonable grounds: the attack on Thebes portrayed in *Seven* looks like an unrealistic and mythical event, and crucial aspects seem difficult to reconcile with the information from other sources, such as Thucydides or Xenophon.

Seven was presented at the City Dionysia of 467 BCE.³ At that time, Athens was a thriving and expanding *polis* leading a large multi-national league of Greek *poleis*, still recovering from the trauma of the Persian invasion and starting to rethink the war as a legendary one.⁴ Those experiences, past and present, put Athens at the centre of an expanding military dynamism, with growing resources. It was the beginning of the golden age of Athenian imperialism, full of naval expeditions, land and sea battles and, naturally, the capture and destruction of towns. Aeschylus' plays precede the writings of the first classical historians and thus offer first-hand information from the period in which Athens was growing to her

hegemonic position in Greece, so they are a crucial (but for obvious reasons also a problematic) source for military historians.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to put *Seven* in its historical military context in order to find out not only what historical events and particular military practices could have influenced the narrative but also how it can possibly contribute to the understanding of what is usually labelled 'siege warfare'. What is there in *Seven* that can be regarded as historical and reliable, and what cannot? To answer this question I will begin by describing the military context that can be reconstructed from other sources (mainly the classical historians) and then go on to analyze the fictional and realistic elements contained in *Seven* regarding Greek poliorcetics in general, contrasting them with contemporary evidence. I will finally describe what I believe is the real contribution of *Seven* to our knowledge of Greek siege warfare: the experience of a besieged community.⁵

Contextualizing *Seven*

Two complementary aspects will help us to set the military context of *Seven*: the historical events of the period and Aeschylus' own military experience, which naturally influenced his approach to war in his plays. As any other citizen of medium-high status in any early fifth-century Greek *polis*, Aeschylus served in the citizen militia of his community. Military service by ancient writers has always been at stake when assessing the reliability of the military information they provide in their writings.⁶ Military details provided by veterans, who had seen proper action and thus had first-hand knowledge of warfare in their time, seem more reliable and accurate, so we tend to judge their military experience favourably. Fifth-century Greeks were also starting to emphasize 'autopsy', personal experience as a witness, as a source of authority, an idea that crystallizes in the classical historians.⁷ Experience, however, is not by itself a guarantee of historicity,⁸ and before assuming full reliability and accuracy in any ancient writer we should take the time to assess the nature of that experience and the ways in which it could have influenced his work, a difficult task given the state of our knowledge about the biographical details of most ancient authors. Aeschylus, who had military experience but wrote predominantly about fictional wars in mythical settings, is a particularly interesting case, so let us start with him.

Very few details are known about Aeschylus' life. In the mists of his lost biography, however, selected echoes of his military service stand out:⁹ the most important detail is his participation in the battle of Marathon (490 BCE; T 1.10; 2.2–3; 11–3; 54; 162.3–4), where he fought close to his brother Cynegirus, who died while trying to climb on a Persian ship (Hdt. 6.114). Aeschylus apparently was so proud of his service there that he mentioned the fact in his famous epitaph: 'Under this monument lies Aeschylus the Athenian, Euphorion's son, who died in the wheatlands of Gela. The grove of Marathon, with its glories, can speak of his valour in battle. The long-haired Persian remembers and can speak of it too' (*Vit. Aesch.* 11; trans. Lattimore).¹⁰ He is also reported to have been present 10 years later at Salamis and Plataea, which seems plausible enough based on contemporary evidence

(T 1.11–12; T 14), but no specific detail survives. And that is basically it: we know of no other military event in which he participated, so his recorded service is limited to the Persian wars. The rest is open to our speculation.

It does not seem likely that he continued to serve after the Persian invasion. Aeschylus was in his mid-30s at Marathon and in his mid-40s at Salamis and Plataea, and although mobilizing citizens of that age was not surprising in ancient Greece,¹¹ it probably responded to the situation of extreme emergency caused by the Persian invasions. Other figures of the time, such as Socrates and Demosthenes, served in their mid- or late 40s, Socrates at Delium and Amphipolis (424 and 422) and Demosthenes at Chaeronea (338), but those were their last recorded acts of duty. Military service usually fell on the shoulders of citizens under 30, and only in times of crisis or manpower shortages were elder citizens also mobilized, as the mass levies in the campaigns of Delium (424, Th. 4.90.1) and Mantinea (418, Th. 5.64) show. After the battle of Plataea the direct threat to Greece vanished and the level of emergency dropped, so the continued enlistment of a 50-year-old playwright during the 470s does not seem likely.

Aeschylus' service before the Persian Wars is also a matter of speculation. We know of just a couple of Athenian military campaigns during the last quarter of the sixth century,¹² but Athens herself was attacked several times in the final years of the century, particularly between 512 and 506. We will get back to that later on, but for now it is interesting to bear in mind that Aeschylus had reached the age for military service precisely at that time: in a moment of considerable emergency at Athens he was part of the age group that was primarily and systematically mobilized. It was perhaps too soon for him to take part in the defence during Cleomenes' invasion in 510, but he might just have been enlisted for the campaign in 506, when the Athenians faced a coordinated invasion on multiple fronts. In the case of earlier service, then, it is likely that he had some sort of experience, and even if he had none, he was at least a direct eye-witness as an Athenian resident to the traumatic events of post-Peisistratid Athens.

So Aeschylus had (at least some) personal military experience. The impact of that fact on his work is difficult to evaluate. We must assume that personal participation in combat somehow contributed to shape his world view and thus may have played a role in his task as a writer, but whether active service turned him into a bard heroizing the past glories of Athens or into a melancholic veteran committed to sharing the real face of war with his audience of fellow veterans,¹³ it is hard to tell, and our answer clearly depends on modern views and expectations. That Aeschylus saw action, had the chance of killing other human beings in battle or lived in a place threatened by enemy invasions means that he certainly knew the business, but whether he is speaking about that experience in a completely honest and reliable way is a radically different matter. Pelling persuasively presents Aeschylus as providing 'a version of history, one which is fashioned, stylized, and elaborated according to some generic conventions and audience expectations',¹⁴ so in the question of historical truth Aeschylus is telling *a* truth, his own truth, that was acceptable for the standards of both poetic composition and other war veterans. As a result, his plays are a mixture of 'fictional' and 'realistic' elements

(the war veteran introducing historical facts and situations and the tragic poet indulging in literary schemes and patterns). Both of them are 'historical', in the sense of corresponding to the mental and physical world of early fifth-century Athens, and thus revealing of contemporary ideas or practices.

Let us now turn to the military context of the time. The Aegean had a long experience of siege warfare and was no stranger to patterns of invasion, assault and destruction of urban centres. This experience was made up of the combination of two cultural systems: the Greek and the Eastern military traditions, interacting in a complex and hardly straightforward process. The Greek tradition, on the one hand, is already represented in Homer, who describes expeditions of what is usually called 'predatory warfare',¹⁵ involving the capture, plunder and destruction of random towns, most of them poorly defended: Achilles and Odysseus claim to have plundered dozens of them at several points (*Il.* 9.328–31; *Od.* 14.229–31), Achilles being one of the most successful sackers of cities in the epic tradition;¹⁶ in addition, the poems contain a number of poliorcetic actions, such as the Epean attack against Thyroessa (*Il.* 11.711–33), the defence of Calydon against the Curetes (*Il.* 9.529–32, 550–2, 573–99), or the references to the campaign against Thebes (*Il.* 4.406, 4.376–8); the description of the city at war in the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.509–40) and the numerous references to the capture of Troy itself (*Il.* 12.15; *Od.* 1.2, 3.130, 5.107, 9.265, 11.533, 14.241, 22.230) should be included as well, and it is worth remembering that the whole setting of the epics is an expedition to capture and plunder a rich city. Not many descriptions of those campaigns can be found in the poems, but a pattern of invasion, assault and destruction of towns, similar to what we find in later sources, can be reconstructed.

This tradition is (sparsely) corroborated by scattered pieces of evidence in the surviving fragments of later lyric poetry, where we find direct and indirect references to towns captured or destroyed,¹⁷ but unfortunately without any narrative contexts. Later sources, essentially Herodotus and Thucydides, frequently incorporate references to military campaigns in the archaic period, and they are commonly centred as well around cities, such as the operations around the Acropolis during Cylon's coup (*Th.* 1.126), Polycrates' expeditions during the time of the Samian thalassocracy (*Th.* 1.13.6), the capture of Nisaea and Sygeum by Peisistratus (*Hdt.* 1.59.4, 5.94.1) and of Epidaurus by Periander (*Hdt.* 3.52.7), or the Boeotians capturing Oenoe and Hysiae in their invading path to Attica (*Hdt.* 5.74.2). This experience was seen by the classical Greeks as a situation of insecurity prior to the full development of the *polis*, as described by Thucydides (1.5–8), who connects it with piracy and the practice of raids for booty. Although later Greeks may see it as something shameful, as Thucydides implies (1.5.1), the truth is that there was a very well-established tradition of poliorcetics, with urban centres as targets, in the Aegean on the eve of the Persian Wars, a tradition that was only exacerbated by the Persian invasion and the activities of the Hellenic alliance.

The impact of Eastern traditions on Greece, on the other hand, has been the subject of a longstanding debate, and military influences are hard to establish. During the archaic period, the Greeks, particularly the Eastern Greeks, came into contact with the powerful Assyrian and Persian empires, whether as mercenaries or as

enemies in direct conflicts.¹⁸ The Persians left a particularly deep impression on the Greek experience: not only during the Persian conquest of Ionia in the mid-sixth century but again during the Ionian Revolt, the Greeks knew of the violence and sophistication of Persian sieges, particularly those of Paphos in 497 and Miletus in 494.¹⁹ As a result of that contact, we may assume that the Greeks had the chance to observe the operations and campaigns of their Eastern neighbours, learn their tactics and adopt their equipment, but, as a matter of fact, none of these left a recognizable mark in archaic Greek military practices: the Eastern powers, mobilizing incredibly vast resources, relied on the integrated action of different kinds of troops and used expensive siege technology to break the defences of resisting towns, but neither the techniques nor the tools found their way into the Aegean: it just seems that the Greeks were unable (or unwilling) to replicate the Eastern ways of war during the archaic period. That radically changed after the Persian Wars, as we will see presently, so I am more inclined to think that the Greek inability to reproduce the Eastern siege techniques was a matter of financing and mobilizing resources (material and human) in sufficient levels.

We have seen that Greece had certain knowledge of different *poliorcetic* traditions by the beginning of the first half of the fifth century and a record of her own in the capture and destruction of towns. The region then entered a new period of slightly more frequent and sophisticated operations. The aftermath of the Persian Wars originated a new wave of Greek *poliorcetic* activity, mainly conducted by the Delian League and led by Athens: the coalition blockaded Thebes for a few weeks in 479/8 (Hdt. 9.86–8) and Sestus through the winter in the same season (Hdt. 9.114–8; Th. 1.89.2), attacked Byzantium in 478 (Th. 1.94), captured Eion in 476 (Th. 1.98.1), Sciros in 475 (Th. 1.98.2), and Caristos sometime around 470 (Th. 1.98.3), more or less when they blockaded Naxos (Th. 1.98.4), while they surrounded and blockaded Thasos for three years between 465 and 463 (Th. 1.100.1). The Athenians are presented as competent besiegers by the central years of the decade of 460, when they helped Sparta against the Helots locked in Mount Ithome (Th. 1.102.1–2). Thucydides emphasizes ‘their reputed skill in siege operations’ (*τειχομαχεῖν δυνατόι εἶναι*), and in fact the catalogue of Athenian actions expanded in the following years: they captured Naupactus around 460 (Th. 1.103.3), subjected Aegina to a winter blockade in 459/8 (Th. 1.105.2, 1.108), captured Chaeronea in 447 (1.113) and defeated Samos in 439 after a blockade of nine months (Th. 1.116–7).

Clearly, the Athenians practiced their skills in the context of continued warfare of the *Pentecontaetia*. Perhaps less likely is Herodotus’ claim that Athenian reputation was already established by the time of the Persian Wars, when they were instrumental in the capture of the Persian camp after the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 9.70.1–3), because Athenian warfare before the Persian Wars simply does not offer contexts to justify such expertise. The Athenians led multi-national armies of Ionian allies, so they were, in the end, taking the credit for work executed collectively, and they suffered a few setbacks in practice, the failure to capture Ithome in 464 being the most famous of them.²⁰ This means that we should treat the Athenian reputation with caution, especially because it was the result of a period of intense warfare, and other cities in similar conditions could achieve that level of expertise

themselves: it is striking that the Spartans, for example, felt very confident in capturing Pylos easily in 425 (Th. 4.5.1), although, like the Athenians 40 years earlier at Ithome, they failed to do so in practice.

To sum up, poliorcetic activity seems to have been rather frequent in the Aegean during the first half of the fifth century: most campaigns involved operations around or against urban centres, and marching armies showed a tendency to target settlements in their path sooner or later. Although relatively frequent, nevertheless no homogenous pattern can be detected: some towns were simply ‘captured’ or ‘destroyed’, some others were subjected to a more or less tight blockade; some were taken right away, some others after a few months, most likely through the winter (Sestus, Aegina), and even after a few years, like the three-year blockade of Thasos. Long operations, however, remained a minority, and armies did not seem too eager to spend months on end waiting for a specific target to fall, as confirmed by the complaints of the soldiers during the siege of Sestus (Hdt. 9.117). Direct and quick assault was the most common tactic: invading armies intended to jump over the walls, and the limited availability of resources (human, material, and time) seemed to determine a preference for simple and direct operations. Technology had a limited impact: there are no traces of siege technology, such as towers or artillery, or of construction works such as ramps, palisades or mines, and we may wonder about rams or ladders. As a result, it seems problematic to talk about proper sieges at that time, but simpler poliorcetics were traditionally and frequently practiced in early classical Greece.

Poliorcetics in *Seven*

The attack of a town was then a familiar topic for Aeschylus’ audience. *Seven* addresses the question within the constraints of a tragic play, and that results in a particular mixture of ‘fictional’ and ‘realistic’ elements, as previously mentioned; this allowed the poet to articulate a fictional plot that was sufficiently close to the real experiences and lives of the spectators. To be sure, the general dynamic of the Argive attack against Thebes in *Seven* does not completely correspond to real contemporary practices but represents a literary construction of a military expedition. In order to address the question of its historicity, then, it is crucial to identify and differentiate both sides: ‘realistic’ elements will be here those allegedly extracted from contemporary reality that can be corroborated by other sources, more reliable in terms of military details, such as the works of the classical historians; ‘fictional’ elements will naturally not be here completely fantastic or imaginary ones but those that respond better to the needs of the literary elaboration of the story and have been somehow exaggerated or distorted, and thus cannot be directly associated with contemporary realities. Let us deal with them separately.

Fictional elements

Fictional elements are the result of the specific requirements of the tragic genre, combined with influences from the Homeric epics, rather than invention pure and

simple. In the realm of warfare, I would isolate three: Homeric language, emphasis on heroes and the presence of chariots.

The influence of the Homeric epics in the language of tragedy is a broad and well-studied phenomenon.²¹ There are two interesting examples of that influence related to poliorcetics: one of them is the use of πύργος, 'tower', as a metonymy for 'walls', and the other is the use of λαός, 'host', to represent an army. The term πύργος is consistently used in *Seven* to refer to the walls of Thebes (*Se.* 30, 33, 314, 346, 426, 467, 469, 549, 629, 634, 763, 797, 823), over the more common and natural term at the time, τεῖχος 'wall', which appears just once (*Se.* 89–90). This is a very characteristic epic word, used 48 times in Homer against the 120 references to τεῖχος 'wall' and derivatives. Aeschylus' preference for πύργοι 'towers', which is not used by the classical historians in that sense, suggests an intentional epic flavour. Λαός 'host' (*Se.* 80, 91, 290, 343), on the other hand, is not preferred over the more appropriate στρατός 'army' (*Se.* 36, 40, 59, 64, 79, 124, 302, 369, 583) in *Seven*, but its epic resonances (it appears around 300 times in Homer) and, again, its absence in the classical historians, show the term to be epic in tone. Such terms represent a preference for literary metaphors over narrative accuracy, for 'towers' and 'hosts' over 'walls' and 'armies', and that compromises the historical reconstruction of the military events depicted: what kind of wall, for example, is meant by πύργος 'tower'? Or can the λαοί 'hosts' be related to any contemporary military unit? They are part of the literary conditions of the genre and thus closer to Aeschylus' image of a mythical event than to historical military practices of his own time.

The second element, the emphasis on the decisive role of heroes in action, is even more clearly inspired by epic influence. The performance of heroes throughout the play represents a celebration of individual and aristocratic exploits: Argive and Theban heroes, represented as 'leaders' and 'excellent men' (*Se.* 42, 57, 124, 287, 798), always bear the brunt of the fighting, posted at the gates of the city, leading the action and taking the greater risks. The whole play, from its very title, is conceived as the direct engagement of seven pairs of heroes that appear as leaders of the mass and of one pair of brother-heroes in particular that are struggling for absolute power.²² That this focus on heroes is a fundamental characteristic of epic poetry is perhaps something that needs no repetition,²³ but that the heroes' exploits take place in the context of massive armies actively engaged in the action is still worth emphasizing: in *Seven*, as in the epics, the heroes stand out from a background of a mass of Argive fighters (*Se.* 28, 103, 296) that are sometimes referred to as a 'multitude' (*Se.* 35, 234) and sometimes as a 'wave' (*Se.* 64, 114, 758, 1075). Both elements (massive settings of huge crowds and focus on the exploits of the individual heroes) are characteristic of epic poetry and have been thoroughly studied in the past years, assuming that epic narrative resembled the zoom of a camera and thus went repeatedly from a general view to a particular one and back again. This narrative technique has been branded as 'literary cinematics'.²⁴ Selective focus, then, allows heroic exploits and mass actions to coexist, preserving as well the ideological dominance of the aristocratic elite that identifies itself with the heroes, but although it can be instructive about archaic views of combat, it

certainly contributes nothing to the reconstruction of early fifth-century warfare, a time in which heroic individuality is long gone.

The third element is the presence of chariots in the Argive army. Horses in general were numerically a secondary force in historical Greek armies, which relied predominantly on different types of infantry, so their use in archaic times and their presence in literary sources was the result of a combination of practical and ideological considerations.²⁵ The cavalry was a part of standard Greek armies in the fifth century, but their role in assaults and sieges was naturally limited: although in *Seven* the cavalry leads the attack against Thebes (*Se.* 80), horses were not launched against the wall but were commonly used for scouting, plundering and foraging, while the defenders used them to make quick sallies and hamper the movements of the attackers (*Th.* 2.22.2). Aeschylus seems to use the horses here (and elsewhere) as a visual and aural marker to identify the attackers as a dreadful threat,²⁶ as I will suggest later; the approaching horsemen are then plausible in *Seven* and not incompatible with historical practice, but their presence is perhaps overemphasized. Chariots are a slightly different issue: there are a couple of direct references to chariots in *Seven* (*Se.* 151–3, 204–7), and horses are mentioned (*Se.* 122–3, 245, 460–4) that could represent chariots as well. They are a very characteristic epic element, incidentally associated with assaults in Homer: Hector tries to storm the Achaean wall with chariots (*Il.* 12.50–87), and the Trojan Asius leads his chariot through a gate of the wall (*Il.* 12.110–36). Although this may seem possible in epic action, it is worth emphasizing that Hector's plan is found insane by Polydamas and abandoned (*Il.* 12.61–66) and that Asius is exemplarily killed by Idomeneus after crossing the gate (*Il.* 12.383–401), so the use of chariots for storming operations is controversial even in Homer. Chariots do not seem to feature in fifth-century classical warfare. Rather they had been abandoned except for a few ceremonial and private uses,²⁷ so I am inclined to consider their presence in *Seven* as a literary reproduction of the typical heroic battle gear and a new reference to the epic literary tradition.

These elements are to a great extent the result of the particular narrative and structural conditions of tragedy as a literary genre. They are not entirely fictional but are distortions or exaggerations of a stylized reality. As a result, they have an impact on historical and military reconstruction, because they do not correspond to contemporary practices and thus cannot be taken at face value. Nevertheless, they are revealing of what classical Greeks considered appropriate for legendary figures to do and for legendary events to look like.

Realistic elements

Some elements in *Seven* can be corroborated through other, more historically reliable sources and thus judged as 'realistic', that is, corresponding to contemporary practices. And it is striking that they are significantly more abundant and more crucial for our understanding of Greek warfare than the fictional ones. I will focus on six of them: treason, intelligence, preparations, occupation of the territory, assault and aftermath.

The first element seems to me the most important one as well. The central issue of the tragic plot in *Seven* is treason, a dispute between two factions in which one of them resorts to soliciting external help: Polynices' treason is not only emphasized through the image of a 'foreign' (ἐπακτόν) army (*Se.* 583, 1019) but also intensely deplored, particularly in the words of Amphiaraus (*Se.* 580–90), who sarcastically salutes the 'deed fine to hear of and to relate to those in the future' (*Se.* 581) regarding the leading of an enemy force against one's native land and gods. This is definitely based on contemporary experience: Polynices embodies the figure of political exiles that were legion in the world of the archaic and classical *poleis* and illustrates how victory on one side in political struggle led to immediate exile on the other (*Se.* 637–8); in their defeat, however, they never resigned their legitimacy to return and even to rule their communities, and the device on Polynices' shield (Dike, the goddess of justice, leading him back into the city) clearly illustrates this point.²⁸

Forced to flee (φυγάδης) from their communities, exiles were always involved in diplomatic or military activities and plotting to return home and figure prominently in Thucydides' and Xenophon's accounts.²⁹ It is then common to find them requesting help from other communities, contacting foreign commanders or armies or striking pacts with foreign powers in order to secure their revenge against their political enemies,³⁰ revenge that sometimes is granted, as Thucydides dramatically illustrates in the events of Corcyra (*Th.* 3.80–3). If we concentrate on the period around the Persian Wars, in the decades preceding Aeschylus' *Seven*, we find the Alcmaeonids behind the Spartan intervention against the Peisistratids in 510 (*Hdt.* 5.62–3), a group of Naxian exiles pleading for help to Aristagoras of Miletus around 500 (*Hdt.* 5.30) and Hippias accompanying the first Persian expedition in 490 (*Hdt.* 6.102). Themistocles himself was sentenced to ostracism, but Thucydides points out that he was accused of medism while in exile (*Th.* 1.135), which indicates that exiles were a permanent threat and needed to be carefully watched over.

The second realistic element is that the defenders had the means to anticipate an invasion. In *Seven* there are numerous references to scouts and spies (*Se.* 36–38, 39ff., 285, 369) who relay information about the movements of the enemy, and the eyewitness messenger (*Se.* 41, 375) is in fact one of the main characters of the play.³¹ The question of intelligence in Greek warfare has been addressed in detail recently.³² It was not particularly sophisticated during the archaic and classical periods, consisting mostly of the unsystematic use of spies and scouts and of reliance on circumstantial informants such as *proxenoi* or plotting factions.³³ Information commonly circulated through irregular means, and commanders benefitted from the informal circulation of rumours and information: the classical historians usually mention in passing that the defenders somehow 'learnt' that the enemy was coming, without further details,³⁴ while in tragedy volunteers carry messages for a reward, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* or in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Third, the defenders made their own preparations to repel the attack. Eteocles takes just a couple of measures, both stated at the very beginning: to post men to guard the walls and gates (*Se.* 30–4), and to send spies and scouts to collect

intelligence about the enemy (*Se.* 36–8). Both measures are naturally common in contemporary Greek warfare, but they are just a fraction of what a threatened community could do as reported by other sources, which included repairing the walls, sending the non-combatants to a safe place, collecting the movable goods, strengthening garrisons in neighbouring forts, mobilizing the army, creating ‘special task forces’ or sending legates to potential allies.³⁵ The apparent lack of preparations in Aeschylus’ Thebes seems to me to be a consequence of his preference for other aspects of the plot: a couple of examples serve well enough to recreate the situation of emergency in the city.

A fourth element is the practice of invaders taking control of the surrounding territory, something represented in *Seven* through the army approaching the city (*Se.* 59–61) and encircling it in an attempt to threaten the walls from every direction: the Argives are said at several times to ‘surround’ (*Se.* 121, 247) and move ‘around’ Thebes (περί/ἄμφι, *Se.* 114, 151, 290, 298), and since the Thebans are locked inside the walls, the enemy is left free to command the surrounding area. This occupation of the land is common practice for contemporary armies, plundering surrounding fields in what is in fact part of the Greek strategy of devastation.³⁶ The classical historians use the verb καθίζω/καθέζομαι ‘to settle’ the army, and other derivatives, to describe this action,³⁷ which implies a temporary stop in the march and an attempt to scatter the army across the territory. At this stage, encirclement does not entail a proper siege or blockade but rather an unsystematic attempt to isolate the target from external help while taking positions for an eventual assault, like the Peloponnesians invading Attica (*Th.* 2.18–9) or the Athenians attacking Methone (*Th.* 2.25.1–2).

The fifth element would be the assault itself. Aeschylus offers several details about the process in *Seven* that include approach to the walls (*Se.* 151–5, 295–7), exchange of missiles (*Se.* 158–60, 298–300, 675–6), attack of the gates (*Se.* 160, 249, 376–675) and finally climbing of the wall (*Se.* 634). In the play, the Argives seem to conduct repeated assaults (*Se.* 150–60), and the realistic nature of these seems to be confirmed by the vocabulary of assault in the classical historians, which emphasizes quick and repeated attacks.³⁸ Missiles were probably crucial in contemporary assaults as well, both for the attackers and for the defenders, and since this is still a pre-artillery context, we are perhaps dealing with stones, arrows and javelins. Thucydides’ description of the Plataean assault of the Peloponnesian circumvallation wall in 427 confirms the use of missiles and the tendency to replace heavy equipment by lighter weapons during the action (*Th.* 3.22–3). *Seven* is crucial in another respect: it includes the first reference, to my knowledge, to ladders in a military context in Greek literature (*Se.* 465–7).³⁹ The ladder in question is drawn on the shield of Eteocles and so never used in proper action; later tradition presented another Argive hero, Capaneus, climbing a ladder and being struck dead by Zeus (*Eur. Suppl.* 496ff.; *Phoen.* 1172ff.; *Apol. Bibl.* 3.6.7), but Aeschylus says nothing about that. Ladders in military contexts are rare in Greek literature (the first unequivocal reference is in Thucydides), and there are also scattered references to ‘machines’ in general that may involve ladders,⁴⁰ but it is hard to decide what kind of devices were implied by the term.⁴¹ The lack of direct references to

ladders in the sources does not necessarily entail their absence in real assaults; the Plataeans counting the layers of bricks of the wall in order to estimate the height of their own ladders (Th. 3.20.3–4) shows that they were a very basic and intuitive way to approach a wall. We may note as well that the passage in *Seven* seems to take their use for granted, assuming that the audience is familiar with them. The ladder is, in any case, a good illustration of the kind of military information contained in *Seven*: reality (the scaling ladder) disguised in fictional robes (drawn on a shield and never used in proper action).

The emphasis on gates is another aspect of the assault. In *Seven*, military action is concentrated around the gates of Thebes, which bear the brunt of the Argive attack: the Argives cast lots to assign the gates, (*Se.* 55–6), where the heroes are posted (*Se.* 124–6) and against which the main assault is finally targeted (*Se.* 160, 615), forcing Eteocles to countermeasure with seven Theban champions to face them (*Se.* 57–8, 376–675). As a result, both the attack and the final salvation of the city are decided there. The epics show some echoes of this practice, when the Trojans storm the Achaean camp and, even though there is battle around the walls and towers (*Il.* 12.35–37), the attack focuses on and succeeds at the gates (*Il.* 12.340–1, 445–71, 13.679–80).⁴² This makes sense from a narrative point of view: the gates are the only differentiated part of the fortification in *Seven*, and they are in fact the weakest one (the locks are expected to break, *Se.* 396). In contemporary warfare, attention to gates was naturally possible, by both the attackers (Th. 4.130.2, 5.10.1–3) and the defenders (Aen. Tact. 5, 18.1–2, 18.3–22, 19–20, 28), but it was not that crucial. Attacks seem to concentrate on the walls themselves, and gates were approached primarily if there were chances to open them with the help of a fifth column inside,⁴³ so Aeschylus' treatment, although it has contemporary parallels, seems an exaggerated emphasis with epic echoes and narrative purpose.

Finally, *Seven* offers information on the aftermath of the capture of a town: the victors set up a trophy (*Se.* 277–8), commonly connected with land battles but also potentially the result of an eventual engagement after a sally, when the town is plundered and destroyed. Aeschylus emphasizes destruction several times throughout the play (*Se.* 220–2, 324–25, 338–44, 351–68, 427, 434, 531), and all the relevant elements of poliorcetic destruction are present in his descriptions: plunder, fire, captivity, slaughter. These were frequently the consequences of capture in contemporary warfare, as described in detail in the classical historians.⁴⁴ What is really striking in *Seven*, however, is that the Thebans ultimately repel the invasion and the city is saved, but Aeschylus almost ignores that (*Se.* 792–8), so unfortunately we do not have a detailed description. The tragic plot seems to take over immediately, and despite salvation from military destruction, 'grieving has spread right through the city: the walls groan, and so does the soil that loved these men' (*Se.* 900–2): sorrow for the fate of the brothers obscures the joy for the salvation of the city (*Se.* 822–960), and from this point on the motif of the attack is abandoned in the play. This change of subject is symbolically expressed in the play through the trophy of *Atē* erected at the gates of the city (*Se.* 957), representing the turning point (τροπή) of the plot from the conflict of the brothers

(the trophy is erected on the spot where they killed each other) to the consequences of their hubristic behaviour (embodied by *Atē*, 'blindness').⁴⁵

Seven, then, offers a combination of fictional and realistic elements in order to satisfy the different aspects of the complex nature of a tragic play: a mythical setting to develop memorable and exemplary stories and realistic touches to make the plot more familiar and closer to the audience's interests and expectations. On the complex question of historicity, I would not say that *Seven* represents an entirely fictional type of siege, but rather that there are no real, contemporary sieges like the one in *Seven*.

The experience of threatened communities

In light of this literary mixture of real and imaginary sieges, we may wonder from where precisely did Aeschylus get his inspiration to articulate his version of the attack against Thebes, and a tempting candidate comes to mind: the real attack against the real Thebes by the Greek coalition in 479/78. This is not a commonly discussed event: according to Herodotus (Hdt. 9.86–8), the coalition marched against Thebes after the victory at Plataea as a punishment for their medism and stormed it until the Thebans agreed to surrender a group of their leaders, whom they held responsible for the alliance with the Persians. The operations lasted for about three weeks, and then the coalition just broke camp and left. Thucydides does not mention the episode. The possibility seems attractive because it happens to be the same target and, as in *Seven*, it was ultimately spared and avoided destruction; the historical event also had some dramatic touches, according to Herodotus, such as the coalition's commitment not to withdraw before taking the city (Hdt. 9.86.1), echoed by Aeschylus in *Seven* (Se. 42–54);⁴⁶ and it was a fairly recent event, some 12 years before the production of *Seven*, with at least part of the Athenian audience probably having taken part in it.

It sounds attractive but unlikely: Herodotus' account differs in practice from Aeschylus', particularly on the negotiations that led to the end of the blockade and the question of medism, and although the episode cannot be completely discarded, the coincidence in the target is no reason to consider it the sole or even the main source of inspiration: a historical siege of Thebes is not necessary to produce a literary version, and we should ultimately explain why an Athenian playwright would choose a foreign event when he had much closer and direct sources of inspiration. We cannot deal with this in detail here, but the Athenians had reasons to select Thebes as the setting of exemplary stories such as those presented in drama: their contempt for the Theban medism during the Persian wars generated a negative image of Thebes, which 'provides the negative model to Athens' manifest image of itself with regard to its notions of the proper management of city, society and self'.⁴⁷ From the Athenian point of view, Thebes was a failed and faulty *polis*, ideal for the depiction of human excesses and vices.⁴⁸

Aeschylus then used Thebes as the setting for his story, but he did not necessarily need the Theban experience to complete it. In fact, I do not believe that he was trying to reproduce one particular event but rather he was trying to create a new

one drawing on the cumulative memory of multiple similar events. He is 'then' not looking for inspiration in one single siege but in the shared experience of warfare and poliorcetics of his time. And this experience is mainly an Athenian experience: Aeschylus is an Athenian addressing Athenians about matters of interest for Athenians; this is basically what Athenian tragedy is about, an Athenian look into an Atheno-centric world.⁴⁹ Aeschylus would be then potentially more inclined to draw from contemporary Athenian experience, not only to recreate the Argive attack against Thebes but also (and more crucially) to describe the emotional state of a community threatened by an invading army: since emotional contexts are harder to find elsewhere, this is, I believe, the real contribution of *Seven* to the historical reconstruction of Greek siege warfare.

When we discussed Aeschylus' military experience, we noticed that Athens had been attacked at least six times, according to our sources, between 515 and 480: in 512, the Spartans commanded by Anchimolius landed with an expeditionary force in Phalerus (Hdt. 5.63.2–4); in 510, king Cleomenes invaded Attica and occupied Athens to expel the Peisistratids (Hdt. 1.64–5); in 508, Cleomenes led a second invasion with a small force that occupied the Acropolis but was ultimately defeated and expelled (Hdt. 5.70–2); two years later, in 506, the Athenians successfully faced a three-pronged invasion by Peloponnesians, Boeotians and Euboeans (Hdt. 5.74–7); in 490, the Persians landed in Attica but were defeated in Marathon in the first invasion (Hdt. 6.102–16); and finally in 480, Xerxes captured and destroyed the city during the second invasion (Hdt. 8.50–4). Athens would not be attacked again until the Spartan invasion of 445 (Th. 1.114), but in the meantime there were several threats: the Spartans planned an invasion around 465 at a request from the Thasians (Th. 1.101); the Corinthians threatened the Attic border when they invaded the Megaris in 459 (Th. 1.105–6); and a Spartan army marching across Boeotia was preemptively attacked by the Athenians at Tanagra in 457 (Th. 1.107.4–108.3). This means that during Aeschylus' life Athens had been in danger at least 10 times, 5 of them in real danger, with invading forces taking control of the city. Athenian citizens from Aeschylus' generation, then, had seen their own town threatened many times, and they had a shared and traumatic experience of what was it like to be besieged: the destruction of the city in 480 was still fresh in their memory; the temples of the Acropolis had not been rebuilt yet.⁵⁰

The experience of being attacked by an enemy army at your own gates is illustrated in *Seven* through a range of elements. First, Aeschylus reproduces the typical exhortations to defend the fatherland (*Se.* 14–6, 304–5, 416, 668), the sanctuaries (*Se.* 14–16, 177, 582), the houses (*Se.* 73, 482) and the city (*Se.* 165, 214, 582), exhortations that are part of a longstanding Greek tradition emphasizing the central elements of the Greek community: the farms, the gods and the people. The tradition goes back to Homer (*Il.* 8.57, 12.243, 15.496, 15.663, 17.157, 18.265), but it can be found as well in Tyrtaeus (frgs. 10.1–2, 10.13–14, 12.33–34) and continues throughout the classical period, as shown in the Oath of the Athenian ephebes (Lycurg. *Leoc.* 1.77) and in Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.4.17.3–4). These elements embody the identity and essence of the Greek community, so their mention indicates that an invasion puts the survival of the entire group at stake.

The second element is the constant invocations for divine protection, characteristic of situations of extreme danger. The list of divine figures invoked in *Seven* is rather long: there are references to Zeus (*Se.* 69, 116, 255, 510–20, 614, 629–30, 1074), Ares (*Se.* 105ff., 135–9, 414), Athena (*Se.* 128–30, particularly Athena Onca: *Se.* 164–5, 501–3), Poseidon (*Se.* 130–2), Aphrodite (*Se.* 140–4), Apollo (*Se.* 145–7, 159–64), Artemis (*Se.* 148–9, 154, 450) and Hera (*Se.* 152), all of them well known figures from the Olympic pantheon. There is also an isolated reference to Earth (*Se.* 69), but the most common invocation in the play is to ‘divinity’ or ‘gods’ in general (*Se.* 35, 87, 94ff., 109, 166–180, 210–15, 219, 253, 301–2, 312–3, 417–8, 422, 450, 562, 566–7, 626–8, 1074). The list includes real and significant Theban cults, like those of Ares, Apollo Ismenios, Artemis or Zeus. From a strictly Theban point of view, there might be a couple of omissions (Dionysus and Heracles) and perhaps a couple of additions (Poseidon, Hera), but the overall impression is of a significant effort on the part of Aeschylus to represent contemporary Theban cults, but perhaps from the perspective of an outsider.⁵¹

The third and most important element is Aeschylus’ permanent effort to describe the atmosphere of fear and anxiety among the citizens, particularly the non-combatants. Fear is an overriding emotion in *Seven*, emanated almost exclusively from the chorus of Theban women and threatening to spread, thus prompting Eteocles’ desperate attempts to calm them down. The vocabulary of fear is very rich, evoking different emotional nuances and benefitting from the long tradition in Greek literature of emotional metaphors: the most important and frequent terms are undoubtedly φοβός ‘fear’ (*Se.* 121, 214, 240, 259, 270, 287, 386, 498, 500) and δέιδω ‘to fear’ (*Se.* 190, 203, 249, 764), with their respective derivatives,⁵² but there is also room for other, more metaphorical alternatives.⁵³ The vocabulary of emotions is not as rich in prose as in poetry, but the classical historians confirm in their narratives this emotional context of panic, for example when Athens was threatened by the Persians in 480 (Hdt. 8.41) or when they received news of the disaster in Sicily in 413 (Th. 8.1).

In *Seven*, the proximity of the enemy is naturally the immediate stimulus of fear, but since the Thebans are locked behind the walls, and since in scenographical terms the enemy is outside the scene, those stimuli are predominantly acoustic, materialized in particularly frightening noises: the ‘clatter’ (κτύπον) of weapons (*Se.* 83, 100, 103), the ‘rattle of chariots’ (*Se.* 151), the ‘clashing of bronze-rimmed shields’ (*Se.* 160), the ‘noise’ (βρόμος) of stones (*Se.* 213) or horses (*Se.* 476), the ‘neighing of horses’ (*Se.* 245), the ‘clatter at the gates’ (*Se.* 249) and the din of multiple noises in confusion (*Se.* 203–7, 239) all contribute to create an atmosphere of panic that culminates in a wonderful synesthesia: the chorus can ‘see the noise’ (κτύπον δέδορκα, *Se.* 103). The voices and cries of the enemy are another aural source of fear, particularly the war-cry (ἐπηλάλαξεν, *Se.* 497) and the experience of hearing a different dialect (*Se.* 170), as corresponding to the Doric-speaking Argives, thus presenting them as barbarians.⁵⁴ Conversely, visual stimuli are less abundant, only the ‘terror of their warlike arms’ (*Se.* 121). Noises are also a terrifying experience in the accounts of the classical historians, and there are frequent references to the ἀλαλαμός, the confusion created by the different dialects spoken in combat, particularly when singing the paean, and to other noises.⁵⁵

The ultimate cause of fear is the vivid awareness of the consequences of defeat. *Seven* repeatedly emphasizes the fate of towns under attack: they are captured (*Se.* 117–19, 218) and subjugated (*Se.* 233, 338), and the population is enslaved (*Se.* 73, 253, 323, 471, 793) and slaughtered (*Se.* 345–50), the town itself emptied (*Se.* 330, 531) and abandoned by the gods (*Se.* 218) and finally sacked and destroyed (*Se.* 220–2, 324–5, 338–44, 351–68, 427, 434). Prospects for the population are then terrible, but the chorus is even more emphatic about the fate of captured women, which is especially severe, ‘just like men when their city is captured’ (*Se.* 257), and worse than death, since ‘even the dead fare better than they [the maidens] do’ (*Se.* 336–7): women suffer enslavement (*Se.* 110–1), capture (*Se.* 326–9, 454–6) and ultimately rape (*Se.* 333–5, 363–8), which is referred to in indirect ways, such as maidens being ‘plucked unripe’ and suffering ‘nocturnal consummation’ and ‘captive coupling’. These are all frequent outcomes of historical campaigns against urban centers, with the population being massacred or sold into slavery and the site plundered and destroyed by fire.⁵⁶

It is perhaps remarkable that the chorus seems to emphasize maidenhood when referring to the situation of women: they speak of ‘maidens’ (*Se.* 110, 171, 454–5), of ‘those just reared’ (*Se.* 333) or of those ‘new to suffering’ (*Se.* 363). The chorus itself seems to be made up of maidens,⁵⁷ and highlighting maidenhood makes sense both in a literary context, possibly for dramatic effect, and in contemporary warfare, in which maidens are not only sexual and economic prizes for the conquerors but also a proper target of ravaging strategies.⁵⁸ Fear, in any case, is consistently feminine in *Seven*. In the conversation between Eteocles and the chorus (*Se.* 182–286), when the king Eteocles scolds the Theban women for their exaggerated pleas to the gods, it has been argued that Aeschylus is contrasting an emotional (feminine) approach to religion (*Se.* 211–15, 239–41, 259) with a rational (masculine) one (*Se.* 226–32): he promises to sacrifice victims to the gods, set up monuments of victory and exhibit spoils of war in the temples, proper ways to invoke the gods instead of ‘mournfully, with wild, useless pantings’ that ‘won’t make it any less impossible for you to avoid what is fated’ (*Se.* 265–81). The question is complex, and it has been discussed intensively,⁵⁹ but if we consider Eteocles’ duty to maintain order in the context of an attack, I find this intentional contrast between proper and improper ways to behave more compelling.

The fourth and final element to illustrate the experience of being attacked is the effort by the central power to control internal dissidence: Eteocles is repeatedly shown attempting to control manifestations of low morale (*Se.* 182–286), represented by the chorus falling in front of the images of the gods, crying, shouting and running in panic (*Se.* 185–93, 279–81). This pursues two complementary objectives. First, it keeps morale high, emphasizing self-restraint as a civic and proper male attitude (Eteocles approves a pious behaviour, *Se.* 216–18, but not excessive, *Se.* 236–38). Second, it reduces the chances of an enemy invasion: in *Seven*, lack of self-restraint is ‘very best to advance the cause of the enemy outside’ (*Se.* 193) and puts ‘yourself into slavery, and me, and the whole city’ (*Se.* 254); the result is that ‘the city is being sacked by its own people from within’ (*Se.* 194). Internal dissidence and enemy invasion are two factors that tend to work in tandem in contemporary political and military practice as well, and we should connect this to the

wandering exiles and the political disputes previously discussed. Warnings to fight internal unrest and the exhortation to maintain high morale and concord under siege are well represented in classical literature (Aen. Tact. 2.1, 2.7, 3.3.4, 5.1, 9.2, 10.20, 11.1, 14.1, 22.5, 22.6–7, 23.6). A good measure in times of crisis is then to reassert centralized power, as Eteocles does,⁶⁰ and Aeneas Tacticus explains (10.1–11, 10.20, 10.23–26, 11, 14, 22.2), something represented in the exceptional measures taken by threatened communities, such as sending the women and children abroad, limiting the mobility of citizens, forbidding political reunions and so on.⁶¹

These elements help Aeschylus to present mythical Thebes as the quintessential community under attack, contextualizing his tragic plot in a familiar situation for him and for his audience.

***Seven against Thebes* and classical warfare**

Seven is an interesting but generally overlooked source for military historians. Aeschylus lived during the crucial decades of Athens' rise to hegemony in Greece and had personal experience both of the greatest battles of his time and of the frequent threats the Athenians had to face. He was an outstanding intellectual, reflecting on the great challenges and questions of human life, and he was particularly sensitive to the sufferings inherent in human experience. He was then able to recreate not only material and practical aspects such as the process of invasion and assault of a town but also emotional situations such as fear of destruction and encouragement to fight. For that purpose he drew from the pool of personal and communal experiences that militaristic Athenian society had accumulated during the previous decades and from the common knowledge of practical details that were familiar to them.

Military historians are no longer exclusively concerned about the material and organizational aspects of war and combat but are increasingly interested in the experiences of ancient combatants and non-combatants. With an adequate understanding of the conditions and circumstances of Aeschylus's tragedy, *Seven* certainly offers valuable insights into both.

Notes

- 1 This paper is part of a 'Ramón y Cajal' research project (RYC-2011–08161) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MICINN). It also benefited from coverage of the project HAR2012–30870 (funded by MINECO) directed by Dr. Miriam Valdés. I wish to thank all the participants and attendants at the 'War, Trauma and Religion' symposium for their inspiring comments on the paper, and particularly Isabelle Torrance for her invaluable help editing this contribution; I appreciate her careful and incisive reading of my text and her many stimulating comments. They all contributed to make this piece better. All remaining mistakes are naturally my own. I came across Geoffrey Bakewell's '*Seven against Thebes*, City Laments, and Athenian History' (in M.R. Bachvarova, D.M. Dutsch, and A. Suter [eds.], *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean: Commemoration in Literature, Folk-Song, and Liturgy*. Cambridge [2016] 106–126) too late to make use of it in this chapter.
- 2 For example, the *paian* in military context (Rawlings 2007:192n.17, Krentz 2013:141), aspects of religious festivals (Pritchard 2013:92n.47), the *tropaion* (Pritchard 2013:168), citizens' obligation to serve (Pritchard 2013:79, 202n.60), information gathering

- (Russell 1999:141n.5, 170n.121), civic ideology of courage (Trittle 2000:44–5). Even in a work devoted to siege warfare, such as Kern's, the use of *Seven* is extremely limited (Kern 1999:106, 154, 158–60).
- 3 For the context of Athenian drama and *Seven*, see Torrance 2007:9–20.
 - 4 Salamis: Cartledge 1997:25, Pelling 1997:1–2. Plataea: Boedeker 1998, Boedeker and Sider 2001.
 - 5 Other treatments in Kern 1999:158–60, Trittle 2000:44–5, among others.
 - 6 See for example Trittle 2006 on Herodotus and Hunt 2006 on Thucydides. For recent assessments on the literary sources for the reconstruction of ancient Greek warfare, see Hornblower 2007, Millett 2013.
 - 7 Rood 2006, Luraghi 2006b.
 - 8 See Whatley 1964, Hornblower 2007, Whitby 2007 for the problems of reconstructing historical events from the accounts of eye witnesses.
 - 9 Evidence compiled and analyzed in Sommerstein 2008:xi. Following him, fragments beginning with 'T' refer to the *Testimonia* in Radt 1985. See also Podlecki 1999:4.
 - 10 See Sommerstein 2010b:195–201 for a recent analysis. The epitaph is always mentioned to emphasize the fact that Aeschylus decided to remember his one-time participation in Marathon instead of his reputation as playwright: see for example Hanson 1990:46; Raaflaub 2001:312–13, Lendon 2005:49–50, Millett 2013:52, Trittle 2014:90.
 - 11 See Hanson 1990:89–95, van Wees 2004:46.
 - 12 See Frost 1984.
 - 13 See Trittle 2000:107–10, Raaflaub 2001:312–3, Marincola 2007.
 - 14 Pelling 1997:1.
 - 15 van Wees 1992:167–258, Jackson 1995, Rawlings 2007:28–31.
 - 16 Among his victims we find the towns of Thebe (*Il.* 1.366–67, 6.415, 16.153), Lyrnessos (*Il.* 16.57, 19.60, 19.296, 20.92, 20.192), Pedassos (*Il.* 20.92) and the islands of Lesbos (*Il.* 9.129, 9.271), Tenedos (*Il.* 11.625) and Scyros (*Il.* 9.668), not to mention other unnamed (but always in plural) towns (*Il.* 1.125, 9.328–31, 18.342).
 - 17 Capture: Archil. frg. 23.19 West; Mimn. frg. 9.6 West; Theog. 236. Destruction: Archil. frg. 23.18 West; Stesich. frg. S 118.7 Page; Solon frg. 4.5 West; Theog. 951.
 - 18 Evidence of contacts between Greeks and Eastern powers is collected by Luraghi 2006a, Dezső and Vér 2013, Hale 2013:180–4, Raaflaub 2013. Contacts are related to Greek mercenary service abroad. On Assyrian warfare, see Stillman and Tallis 1984, Bahrani 2008.
 - 19 Paphos: Meier 1971, 1973, Wright 2007. Miletus: Hdt. 6.18–21. Persian warfare: Briant 1999.
 - 20 We can add failures in Paros in 489 (Hdt. 6.133–6), Halieis around 460 (Th. 1.105.1), Pharsalus, Sicyon and Oeniadae, possibly in 454/3 (Th. 1.111.1–3) and Kitium in 451 (Th. 1.112.2–4).
 - 21 See Goldhill 1997:129–30.
 - 22 See Torrance 2007:64–7, 70–83.
 - 23 See, in general, Nagy 1979, 2013. See also van Wees 1988:15–22, 1992:78–81.
 - 24 van Wees 1997:673–4, with references.
 - 25 Worley 1994, Hunt 2007:117–9, Rawlings 2013:22–3.
 - 26 And perhaps also to emphasize their Argive identity; see Cameron 1971:74–84, Torrance 2007:83.
 - 27 Greenhalgh 1973, Crouwel 1995:311.
 - 28 A connection of this detail with Herodotus' anecdote (Hdt. 1.60) about a woman disguised as Athena leading Peisistratus back to Athens (an anecdote that would certainly resonate in the minds of the audience of *Seven*) has been persuasively made by Hutchinson 1985:146–7, cf. Torrance 2007:80.
 - 29 Hdt. 1.64.3, 1.150.1, 3.44–46, 5.30.1, 5.62–63, 5.72; Th. 1.24.5, 1.111.1, 1.113.1, 1.126.11–12, 2.30.1, 3.85, 4.1.3, 4.52, 4.66, 4.76.2, 5.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.6–8, 4.8.20, 4.8.28, 5.2.31, 6.5.10, 7.1.43, 7.2.5.

- 30 Hdt. 3.44.1, 46, 5.62, 5.70; Th. 1.24.4–6, 1.107.4, 1.115.2, 2.2.2, 2.33, 3.2.3, 3.34.1–2, 4.1, 4.66.3, 4.76, 5.4, 5.33.1, 8.5, 8.5–7, 8.91.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.6–8, 4.4.15, 4.8.20, 5.2.8–9, 5.2.25–27, 6.5.10, 7.2.5.
- 31 See Hutchinson 1985:48, Roisman 1999, Russell 1999:170.
- 32 Richmond 1998, Russell 1999, 2013.
- 33 Losada 1972.
- 34 Examples: Th. 1.26.3, 1.31.2, 1.47.1, 1.57.6, 1.61.1, 1.90.1, 1.106.2, 1.116.1, 1.126.7.
- 35 Athens in 431 (Th. 2.13–18). See also Hdt. 8.36.2, 8.41, 9.6; Th. 1.18.2, 1.65, 2.6.4, 2.14, 2.17, 2.78.3–4, 4.123.4; Aen. *Tact.* 2–6, 8–14, 22, 24–30.
- 36 Harvey 1986, Foxhall 1995, Hanson 1999.
- 37 Th. 2.18.1, 5.61.4; Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.21; Aen. *Tact.* 23.1.2.
- 38 For example, *πειράω* ('make an attempt, try', Hdt. 1.84.2; Th. 2.33.2) or *προσβάλλω* ('rush against', Hdt. 3.54.1; Th. 2.56.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.15).
- 39 This is, incidentally, also one of the first references to a 'hoplite' in Greek literature (*ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης*, also *Se.* 717). See Lazenby and Whitehead 1996, Echeverría 2012.
- 40 Ladders (*κλίμακες*): Th. 3.20–3, 4.135, 5.56.5; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11, 7.2.7–9. Machines (*μηχαναί*): Th. 2.18.1, 2.58.1, 2.76.4, 4.13.1, 4.100.1, 4.115.2, 5.7.5, 6.102.2, 7.43.1, 8.100.5; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.27.
- 41 See a discussion in Kern 1999:94–5, 105–7.
- 42 Rawlings 2007:130.
- 43 Th. 2.2.2, 4.67, 4.130.5–6; Aen. *Tact.* 11.7, 18.13–19, 23.11, 24.6–7, 29.7.
- 44 Treatment of captured cities: Kern 1999:135–62, Strauss 2007:240–1, Gaca 2010, van Wees 2010.
- 45 This was pointed out to me by the editor, Isabelle Torrance, whom I thank for the many interesting suggestions and comments.
- 46 It is a rather unusual commitment in historical episodes, with only a few parallels in the sources (Ephorus fr. 216 Jacoby; see Torrance 2007:30, 48–51). Indeed it is possible that Herodotus was influenced by Aeschylus' *Seven* in adding some dramatic touches to his own version of the episode. On tragic elements in Herodotus' narrative, see Saïd 2002, Griffin 2006.
- 47 Zeitlin 1990a:131. For Theban medism and Athenian contempt, see Shrimpton 1971.
- 48 On the vices and also the virtues of Thebes in *Seven*, see Edmunds in this volume.
- 49 Raaflaub 2001:334–6, Saïd 2005, with bibliography.
- 50 See Podlecki 1999:30.
- 51 For cults in Thebes, see Schachter 1981–1994.
- 52 *φοβέω* 'to fear' (*Se.* 262, 476), *ὑπερφοβέομαι* 'to be excessively frightened' (*Se.* 238), *ὑπερδείδω* 'to fear excessively' (*Se.* 292).
- 53 *Φεύγω* 'to flee' (*Se.* 208), *φυγή* 'flight' (*Se.* 191), *τάρβος* 'fear' (*Se.* 289), *ταρβοσύνης* 'frightening' (*Se.* 240), *τρέω* 'tremble' (*Se.* 397, 436), *φρίσσω* 'to shudder' (*Se.* 490), *γοργός* 'gorgon' (*Se.* 537).
- 54 Podlecki 1999:30, Torrance 2007:88–91, and see especially Griffith in this volume on the soundscape of *Seven*.
- 55 For the paean in combat, see Pritchett 1971:105–8. Aeschylus directly assumes in *Seven* that singing the paean is meant to 'give confidence to our friends and dispel their fear of the foe' (270). See Hanson 1990:149–50, Krentz 1991 for noises in the battlefield.
- 56 Treatment of women: Kern 1999:158–62, Gaca 2011, 2014, and Meineck in this volume.
- 57 Byrne 1997, Torrance 2007:15, 93–4, Sommerstein 2008.
- 58 For maidens in warfare, see Gaca 2014, 2015.
- 59 For (feminine) fear in *Seven*, see Byrne 1997; for the discussion on the clash of masculine and feminine attitudes to prayer, see Torrance 2007:51–3, 94–101, with bibliography.
- 60 See Torrance 2007:27–9.
- 61 Chaniotis 2013:441–3.

6 Eteocles and Thebes in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*

Lowell Edmunds

Introduction

Eteocles in the *Seven* has often been described by classical scholars as a divided character: the leader of the city and the accursed son of Oedipus.¹ It is said that in the course of the tragedy he is first one, the leader, and then at a certain point suddenly becomes the other, the accursed son.² Another favourite theme of discussion has been Eteocles' attitude toward the women of Thebes. His attitude has often been studied as a separate aspect of his character. This chapter returns to Eteocles as military and political leader and in particular to his conception of the city that he must defend.³ It is a double conception. On the one hand, his Thebes has attributes that an Athenian audience would have seen as positive. On the other, it is the city of aboriginal crime and conflict, which the Athenian audience would have seen as negative. For Eteocles, however, this ancestral city of his is positive. He does not make the distinction between two Thebeses that is here proposed. There is thus a contradiction between Eteocles' conception of Thebes and the audience's perception of this city as conceived by him.

Eteocles' conception of the city: the good Thebes

Eteocles is the king (*Seven* 764, 804), and he is the self-proclaimed helmsman whose duty it is to save the city from the storm that threatens it (*Seven* 1–3, etc.).⁴ His opening speech has an anachronizing strain that makes heroic-age Thebes a recognizable fifth-century Greek city and one that in some respects an Athenian audience would have found unobjectionable, perhaps even admirable. This point can be argued without commitment to a position on the old question of whether the Athenian audience is addressed directly as 'surrogate Thebans.'⁵ Eteocles addresses the male citizens of Thebes as Κάδμου πολῖται 'citizens of Cadmus', and he twice refers to the city as a *polis* in the first six lines.⁶ His address divides the citizens into three age groups, in a way that would have been familiar to the Athenian audience.⁷ The same division occurs later in Thucydides, in Pericles' speech to the Athenians on the final preparations for the war (Thuc. 2.13.6–7).⁸ Further, even if the champions chosen by Eteocles in the central scene of the play are hardly going to form a phalanx, they and the rest of the soldiers are imagined as hoplites.⁹ Eteocles refers to himself as ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης 'hoplite' (717).¹⁰ The verb

that Eteocles uses of his choices of champions, *τάττω* ‘draw up in order of battle’ (284, 448; cf. *ἀντιτάττω* ‘draw up in battle order against’ 408, 621), is the standard one for the function of the general in assigning each soldier to his place in the phalanx, a post that must not be abandoned.¹¹ Eteocles and Polynices are called generals (*στρατηγῶ*) by the Messenger (816).

This somewhat paradoxical hoplite army of Eteocles’ Thebes would be recognizable as such by the Athenian audience. The virtues of Eteocles’ champions, most notably *Aischynē* ‘sense of shame,’ are those expected of the soldiers known to this audience.¹² Eteocles asserts, against the chorus’ admonition concerning the pollution that fratricide would entail (681–82), that he is following the principle of *aischynē* ‘sense of shame’ (683–4), of which he spoke earlier:

If someone should have misfortune, let it be without shame (*aischynē*). For this is the only gain when one is dead. You cannot tell me that there is any fair report of base and shameful deeds.

The chorus is, of course, right to oppose Eteocles on this point, and, as Douglas Cairns has shown, Eteocles’ concern with his honour is ambivalent.¹³ Here, however, Eteocles’ characterization of the city’s defenders as hoplite is the point, and his own principle of shame is consistent in his mind with his conception of the city in this respect. To repeat, this Thebes is positive. In Thucydides, for example, shame is a virtue claimed by both Athenians and Spartans.¹⁴ We see this positive Thebes also in Eteocles’ assertion that death in battle is a recompense to the city for one’s upbringing (*τροφεία*, 477). What one owes one’s parents one owes, by extension, to one’s city. The idea was familiar to Athenians.¹⁵ Consider also the contrast between Eteocles’ Theban army and the attacking Argives. It is developed in detail in the passage on the shields, but it appears already in the shield full of blood in which the Argives dip their hands as they swear an oath by Ares, the god of war, and by Enyo, a goddess of war, and by Phobos, the personification of fear (43–56). Outside the city, there is an impassioned barbaric horde, inside the city a disciplined army.¹⁶ And a citizenry that, in the form of the chorus, is exhorted to use ‘the Hellenic custom of the sacrificial shout’ (269).

Marathon

The great moment of Athens’ hoplite army, composed of citizens unaided by allies or mercenaries, and before its primacy was lost to the fleet, was of course Marathon.¹⁷ One of the Marathon inscriptions has interesting points of contact with *Seven* and tends to support what has been said here about the Athenian audience’s perception.

ἐν ἄρα τοῖσζ’ ἀδάμ[α- - -] λότ’ αἰχμὲν/στῆσαμ πρόσθε
 πυλὸν ἀν[- - -] ἀνχίαλομ πρῆσαι ῥ[- - - -] /
 ἄστν βίαι Περσὸν κλινάμενο[ι - -].

These men, it seems, had indom[itable . . .] when their spears
they set up in front of the gates [. . .]
seashore to burn [. . .]
the city, by their violence routing the [?champions] of the Persians.¹⁹

This epigram is one of four from the base of a monument that bore stelae with casualty lists or reliefs.²⁰ (The stelae are lost.) The deictic τοῖσδε ‘these men’ points to the stele above the epigram.²¹ The monument as a whole, a cenotaph, was somewhere in Athens.²² The epigrams have a *terminus ante quem* of 475 BCE, although the relative dates of the individual epigrams are disputed.²³ The gates referred to in the second line are a place called the Gates, a pass at the southern end of the Marathon plain through which ran the road to Athens.²⁴ Before the battle, the Athenians were drawn up in the precinct of Heracles Empylios ‘Heracles at the Gates’ (Hdt. 6.108.1; *IG* I³.3). In the battle it was at these Gates that the Athenians took their stand.

The diction of the epigram creates a curious miniature of *Seven*.

- (a) In the epigram, the Athenian hoplites had something indomitable or unconquerable, indicated by ἀδάμ[α. In *Seven*, the verb δαμάζω ‘I subdue’ expresses what the chorus fears may happen to the city (338, 765), a city that Eteocles has said is ἀδάματος ‘unconquered’ (233). Already in the prologue he has said that the citizen soldiers of Thebes fight for the freedom of the city, freedom from slavery (74–5).
- (b) αἰχμή ‘spear’ in the epigram does not occur elsewhere in verse inscriptions, and it occurs only once in lyric (Simonides 14 fr. 61a.2 [p. 258] *PMG*). The co-occurrence of αἰχμή ‘spear’ and verb ἵστημι ‘I make (something) stand’ is found elsewhere only once, in Herodotus – of the Argives, as it happens.²⁵ In using these two words together, the poet of the epigram is seeking a way to describe a land army taking a stand.²⁶ In *Seven*, the αἰχμή ‘spear’ is the Argives’ weapon of choice (529, 676) and presumably the weapon with which they are resisted.
- (c) As for burning in the epigram, which is the intention of the Persians, the burning down of the city is what the chorus in *Seven* fears (341–2), and the man on Polynices’ shield says ‘I will burn down the city’ (πρήσω πόλιν, 434).
- (d) The gates are of course different as between epigram and *Seven*. In the epigram the ‘Gates’ are a metaphorical name for a pass twenty-odd miles distant from Athens; in *Seven* the gates are the gates of the city. But if Athens had no wall or an insignificant wall in 490 BCE, as many believe, then the Marathon gates in the epigram are the closest thing to gates that Athens has.²⁷ (It is an archaeological question that is not pursued here.)

It is not suggested that Aeschylus had the epigram in mind, Marathon veteran though he was (and he was also perhaps the loser to Simonides in a competition for an elegy for those who fell at Marathon).²⁸ Nor am I suggesting that anyone in the audience of *Seven* would have thought of the epigram. But the battle of

Marathon, the defence of the city by its hoplite soldiers, was a living and a cultivated memory in Athens in the 460s, the decade of *Seven*. Various monuments to the battle are dated to this period: a white marble trophy at Marathon, the statue group of gods, heroes, and Miltiades that was sent to Delphi (Paus. 10.10.1), the painting of the battle of Marathon in the Stoa Poikilē in Athens (Paus. 1.15.3), and the bronze statue of Athena Promachos on the Acropolis (*IG* I³ 435; cf. Paus. 1.28.2).²⁹ (No doubt the games in honour of Heracles Empylios were another reminder of Marathon.³⁰)

These monuments are political on the part of Athens as statements to other Greeks. They also reflect the political division within Athens in the 460s between Cimon, on the one hand, and Pericles and Ephialtes, on the other. Cimon's father, Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, appeared on two of the monuments just mentioned.³¹ The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* article on Cimon has forbidden us to speak of Cimon as a 'hoplite conservative',³² but in the division of the 460s he was certainly on the side that we would call conservative, and he was an exponent of hoplite warfare even if his major victories were naval.³³ Ephialtes' reform of the Areopagus (462 BCE), which Cimon opposed, was passed while Cimon was out of town, at the head of a hoplite army that he led to the Peloponnesus in support of Sparta.³⁴ Cimon was ostracized in 461 BCE.

To conclude on Marathon, Eteocles' Thebes, the city of the disciplined citizen-soldier, would have seemed to express the virtues that were already in the 460s being looked back on as the virtues of the preceding generation, of the Marathon fighters. The epigram discussed here is probably itself an expression of this Marathon ideology, which was going to continue down into fourth-century oratory.³⁵

Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*

One of the places in which this ideology turns up is the *agōn* of Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BCE). The relevant passage bears a direct relation to *Seven*. Aeschylus, agreeing with Euripides that the poet should make men better in their cities (ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι, 1010), that is, better citizens, says that Athens inherited from him 'men who breathed spears and lances and white-crested casques and helms and greaves and fighting spirits seven oxhides thick' (1016–7).³⁶ It is an image, with epic colouring, of the hoplite, and, although Marathon is not mentioned, the didactic function that Aeschylus claims for himself is the same as the one that the Stronger Argument claims in *Clouds*.³⁷ The latter sums up his educational principles by saying: 'these are the ways in which my education bred the men who fought at Marathon' (*Clouds* 985–6).³⁸ The Aeschylus of *Frogs* wrote, he says, a tragedy that was 'full of Ares,' *Seven* (1021), and, seeing it, every man wanted to be a warrior. (Aeschylus uses the word δαίος 'warrior' [1022], forgetting, that is, Aristophanes forgets, that this word is used only of the Argives in *Seven*: 117–19, 146, 222, 277). Marathon is mentioned later in *Frogs*, further on in the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides (1296–7), and there is perhaps an allusion to Aeschylus' having fought in the battle.³⁹

This brief account of *Seven* in the *Frogs* has abstracted from context, from the *agōn* (and more exactly the epirrhetic part), and has thus left at least two questions

unanswered.⁴⁰ One concerns the humour of ‘full of Ares,’ said by Plutarch to be a quotation of Gorgias (*Quaest. Conv.* 715e = Gorgias B24 D–K).⁴¹ The other, an old question like the first one, concerns Aristophanes’ estimate of his comic characters Aeschylus and Euripides. Scholars have often said that Aeschylus stands for the views of Aristophanes.⁴² Without going into these questions, it is still possible to submit the passage discussed here as evidence that at least some part of an Athenian audience long after the time of *Seven* was well enough aware of this tragedy to appreciate joking about its military ideology, which still had a Marathonian resonance.⁴³

Eteocles and the women of the chorus

To return to Eteocles, it has been proposed here that the city ruled by Eteocles has a military organization and an ethical principle that would not have seemed alien to the Athenian audience. His conflict with the women of the chorus at the beginning of the play can be understood in this context. ‘Most accept Eteokles’ view that the chorus is destroying the morale of Theban citizens with its hysterics – overreact though he may – and sympathize with his effort to silence it.’⁴⁴ His rule for them is: ‘Your part is to be quiet and to remain indoors’ (σὸν δ’ αὖ τὸ σιγᾶν καὶ μένειν εἴσω δόμων, *Seven* 232). The higher rule or principle that Eteocles invokes is obedience (πειθαρχία, *Seven* 224, cf. 196–9). He admonishes the chorus:

μή μοι θεοὺς καλοῦσα βουλευοῦ κακῶς·
Πειθαρχία γάρ ἐστι, τῆς Εὐπραξίας
μήτηρ, γυνὴ Σωτήρος· ὧδ’ ἔχει λόγος. West⁴⁵

Do not call upon the gods and (in so doing) plan badly.
For there is such a thing as Obedience, the mother of Success,
the wife of Safety. So they say.

Eteocles’ reaction to the women’s hysterics reappears in Plato’s *Laws*, where the Athenian describes the same situation that Eteocles faces, prescribing, however, a quite different remedy.⁴⁶ Having first proposed that women receive military training in order to protect the children and the rest of the population while the army is on campaign (813e3–814a5), he then considers the possibility of a large-scale invasion by a Greek or foreign army, when it would be necessary to fight for the survival of the city:

ἢ καὶ τοῦναντίον, ὧν οὐδὲν ἀπώμοτον, ἔξωθεν πολεμίους εἰσπεσόντας ῥώμῃ
τινὶ μεγάλῃ καὶ βίᾳ, βαρβάρους εἴτε Ἑλλήνας, ἀνάγκην παρασχεῖν περὶ
αὐτῆς τῆς πόλεως τὴν διαμάχην γίνεσθαι, πολλὴν πού κακίαν πολιτείας οὕτως
αἰσχροῦς τὰς γυναικας εἶναι τεθραμμένας, ὥς μὴδ’ ὥσπερ ὄρνιθας περὶ τέκνων
μαχομένας πρὸς ὅτιοῦν τῶν ἰσχυροτάτων θηρίων ἐθέλειν ἀποθνήσκεν τε
καὶ πάντα κινδύνους κινδυνεύειν, ἀλλ’ εὐθὺς πρὸς ἱερὰ φερομένας, πάντα
βωμούς τε καὶ ναοὺς ἐμπιπλάναι, καὶ δόξαν τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους
καταχεῖν ὥς πάντων δειλότατον φύσει θηρίων ἐστίν. 814a5–b7

On the other hand – and this is one of those things we can't swear is impossible – suppose a large and powerful army, whether Greek or not, were to force a way into the country and make them fight a desperate battle for the very existence of the state. It would be a disaster for their society if the women proved to have been so shockingly ill-educated that they couldn't even rival female birds, who are prepared to run every risk and die for their chicks fighting against the most powerful of wild animals. What if, instead of that, the women promptly made off to the temples and thronged every altar and sanctuary, and covered the human race with the disgrace of being by nature the most lily-livered creatures under the sun?⁴⁷

It is the same principle to which Paul would appeal 500 years after *Seven*, when the religiosity of women was still a challenge to male control.⁴⁸ The specific point of contention between Eteocles and the women is the correct way, under the circumstances, to pray to the gods for help (cf. 216–18, 230–1).⁴⁹ On this matter, the women do in fact obey (263), after Eteocles calls for silence three more times (250, 252, 262). They agree in effect to cease the wild cries of their *parodos* (78–181). (After the dochmiacs of the *parodos* the first *stasimon* begins in calmer iambic and aeolic rhythms.⁵⁰) The chorus has not, however, lost its fear. It now especially invokes the fate of the women of a captured city, with allusion (in particular *προΐάψαι*, *Se.* 323 cf. *προΐάψεν Il.* 1.3) to the fall of Troy that would have found sympathy in the audience.⁵¹ As for Eteocles' misogyny, whether it is idiosyncratic and, if it is, to what degree it is, are separate questions.⁵²

But the description of Eteocles' Thebes given up to this point is not his complete conception of the city. In its civic deities and in its traditions concerning its foundation, Thebes is the anti-Athens, about which one has often heard in classical scholarship.⁵³

Thebes as the anti-Athens

This other Thebes begins to emerge already in Eteocles' opening exhortation to the army. He calls upon the soldiers

πόλει τ' ἀρήγειν καὶ θεῶν ἐγχωρίων
βωμοῖσι, τιμὰς μὴ 'ξαιρεφθῆναι ποτε,
τέκνοις τε, Γῇ τε μητρί, φιλότατη τροφῷ· 13–15

to defend the city and the altars of the country's gods, so that their honours are not wiped out, and (to defend) the children and mother Earth, dearest nurse.

This *parainesis* at first looks like the standard one, as defined, in effect, by Thucydides' comment on Nicias' speech to the trierarchs before the battle in the harbour at Syracuse. Thucydides describes Nicias as:

ἄλλα τε λέγων ὅσα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ ἤδη τοῦ καιροῦ ὄντες ἄνθρωποι οὐ πρὸς τὸ δοκεῖν τινὶ ἀρχαιολογεῖν φυλαζάμενοι εἶποιεν ἄν, καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων παραπλήσια ἔς τε γυναῖκας καὶ παῖδας καὶ θεοὺς πατράρους προφερόμενα, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῇ παρουσίᾳ ἐκπλήξει ὠφέλιμα νομίζοντες ἐπιβοῶνται. *Thuc.* 7.69.2

saying all that men at such a point of crisis would say, not on their guard against seeming to use old-fashioned speech, things that come out more or less the same on all occasions, as regards wives and children and ancestral gods, but considering them useful in the present distress they call out.

For the three elements, wives, children and ancestral gods, compare the *parainesis* of the Greek generals at the battle of Salamis as reported by the messenger in the *Persians* of Aeschylus:⁵⁴

ὦ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, ἴτε,
ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ', ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ
παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τε πατρῶων ἔδη,
θήκας τε προγόνων· νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών. 402–5

O sons of the Hellenes, onward, free the fatherland, and free your children, wives, and the seats of the ancestral gods, and the graves of your ancestors. Now the contest is for everything.

Here there is a fourth element, the tombs of the ancestors.⁵⁵

While Eteocles' *parainesis* looks like the standard one, there is a difference. Eteocles omits wives, who belong to the *topos*, and he expands on the earth in four lines following the ones in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section. It is the earth that raised the Thebans as 'shield-bearers.' The centrality of mother Earth in Eteocles' conception of Thebes continues in his prayer at the end of the prologue. He begins ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῇ καὶ πολιτισσοῦχοι θεοί 'Oh Zeus and Earth and gods who protect the city.' Earth here is rightly taken to be the Earth of the earlier *parainesis*. Eteocles' omission of wives and his invocation of Earth are owing to his adamant devotion to Theban autochthony, to the birth of the first Thebans from the earth.

As for the gods who protect the city, they are already on the stage in the form of statues and are then identified by the chorus when it enters immediately following Eteocles' prayer. The chorus places robes and garlands on them in supplication. (The chorus invokes them as θεοὶ πολιάοχοι 'gods who hold the city' 109.) In David Wiles's interpretation, the statues are arranged in a semi-circle around the orchestra, with Ares and Aphrodite in the center, opposite the audience.⁵⁶ One of them in particular, namely Ares, figures in the Theban tradition concerning autochthony.

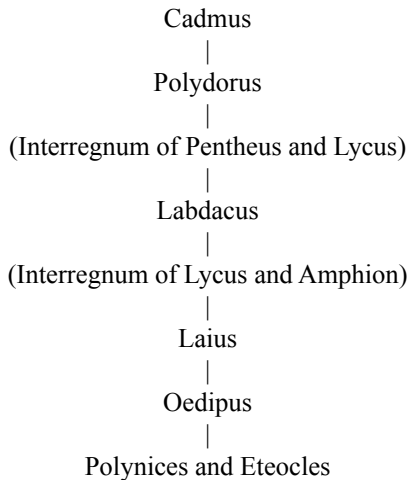
Thebes the anti-Athens in the tradition of its founding

Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, is sent to Boeotia by the Delphic oracle. At the place where the city will be founded there is a spring guarded by a dragon. Cadmus slays the dragon, which was somehow sacred to Ares.⁵⁷ (The other founding, by Amphion and Zethus, variously reconciled with Cadmus', is alluded to at *Seven* 528, where the champion Parthenopaeus defends the fifth gate by the tomb of Amphion.) Retaliation by Ares is prevented by Zeus (Hellanicus fr. 51 Fowler), or Zeus imposes on Cadmus a year of servitude to Ares (Hellanicus fr. 51 Fowler;

Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.2). Ares and Athena give half the teeth of the dragon to him, the other half to Aeetes, king of Colchis. (There are thus two lineages from the dragon's teeth [cf. Pherecydes fr. 22b Fowler], but Aeschylus in *Seven* has no reason to refer to the one from Aeetes' half of the teeth.) Cadmus sows his share of the teeth in the ground and armed men grow up. In fear Cadmus throws stones at them. Thinking that they are being struck from among themselves, they overpower one another and they die except for five men, whom Cadmus makes the first citizens (Pherecydes fr. 22a Fowler). One of the champions chosen by Eteocles, Melanippus, is of their lineage; he is discussed in what follows.

One can see already the negative Thebes, negative, that is, from the Athenian point of view, in the tradition of its foundation. Ares the god of war had no cult or festival in Athens. In the fifth century, by one etymology, the Areopagus was named after him because on this hill he killed Hallirotius, and this murder was the action for the lawcourt.⁵⁸ The ephebic oath included Ares as the god of war.⁵⁹ In *Seven*, he is an ambivalent figure. While the chorus can address him as *παλαιχθων* 'ancient inhabitant' and ask him to defend his land (104–5; cf. 135–7), it is ultimately he who is said to fulfil the paternal curse on Eteocles and his brother (Ἄρης ἀρὰν πατρώ- / αν τιθεῖς ἀλαθῇ, 945–6). He is capricious even in his dealings with his devotees (cf. the image of dice at 414).⁶⁰

Aphrodite, the mother-in-law of Cadmus, is called upon by the chorus as their 'first mother' (προμάτωρ, 140). The daughter of Ares and Aphrodite is Harmonia. Her marriage to Cadmus was inauspicious.⁶¹ Their four daughters are Agave, Ino, Semele, and Autonoe, three of whom tore Pentheus apart, and the fourth was destroyed, by her own mistake, by Zeus' lightning.⁶² The necklace of Harmonia somehow came into the possession of Polynices, and he used it to bribe Eriphyle to persuade her husband Amphiarus to undertake the expedition against Thebes. By a genealogy that seems to have been worked out by the time of the epic *Thebaid* (long before *Seven*) Cadmus stands at the beginning of the dynastic line that leads, after four successors (and two interregna), to Eteocles.⁶³



This story, aside from Polydorus, who is only an integer, is the stuff of Athenian tragedy.⁶⁴

The Theban and the Athenian autochthonies differ, as others have already pointed out.⁶⁵ In Athens, Gaia 'Earth' is a positive nurturing figure. She has an important cult (of Gē Kourotrophos) in which she was called 'Earth Nourisher of Children' near the entrance to the Acropolis (Paus. 1.22.3). 'A popular episode in Attic art is the representation of the birth of Erichthonius, where Gaia is shown handing the baby Erichthonius to Athena.'⁶⁶ To remind Athenians of Theban autochthony, as *Seven* does repeatedly, is to remind Athenians of the difference between themselves and Thebans.

The two Thebeses in Eteocles' description of Melanippus

The two Thebeses that I have described are combined in Melanippus. Eteocles' description of him:

ἐγὼ δὲ Τυδεΐ κεδνὸν Ἀστακοῦ τόκον
τόνδ' ἀντιτάξω προστάτην πυλωμάτων,
μάλ' εὐγενῇ τε καὶ τὸν Αἰσχύνης θρόνον
τιμῶντα καὶ στυγούνθ' ὑπέρφρονας λόγους.
αἰσχυρῶν γὰρ ἀργός, μὴ κακὸς δ' εἶναι φιλεῖ.
σπαρτῶν δ' ἀπ' ἀνδρῶν, ὧν Ἄρης ἐφείσατο,
ρίζωμ' ἀνεῖται, κάρτα δ' ἔστ' ἐγγώριος,
Μελάνιππος· ἔργον δ' ἐν κύβοις Ἄρης κρινεῖ·
Δίκη δ' ὁμαίμων κάρτα νιν προστέλλεται
εἵργειν τεκούση μητρὶ πολέμιον δόρυ.

407–16

I shall position against Tydeus this trusty son of Astacus
guardian of the gate (poetic plur.)

very well-born and honouring the throne of Aischynē
and loathing arrogant words.

For he is free of disgrace and is wont not to be base
and from the sown men, those whom Ares spared,

he is a stem sent up, and he truly is of this country,
Melanippus. Ares will decide the outcome with his dice.

Justice, a brother, truly sends him forth

to ward off the enemy spear from the earth that bore him.

The ten-line description of Melanippus falls into symmetrical parts. In the first two lines he is conventionally named as the 'son of' Astacus, and he receives his assignment.⁶⁷ Then, in the next three lines, we hear of his virtues (409–11). He honours the throne of Aischynē, 'Shame', and he is free of *aischra*, 'disgraceful things', 'disgrace'.⁶⁸ Melanippus is the first of the seven champions whom Eteocles names, and he is, one could say, ethically paradigmatic.⁶⁹ He has the virtues that all

the Theban champions have, in contrast to the Argive attackers.⁷⁰ In the next three lines, Eteocles describes his descent from the Sown Men (412–14). When Eteocles says that he is ‘of this country’, Eteocles makes the identification of earth and Thebes that was implicit in his prayer at the end of the prologue. In the two concluding lines, the Justice that sends Melanippus forth is ‘of the same blood,’ and she sends Melanippus forth to defend his mother earth (415–16). If earth is his mother and Justice is ‘of the same blood,’ then is Justice also the off-spring of earth? Certainly not in Greek religion. Justice is the daughter of Zeus and Themis (*Theog.* 901–2). One has to think of line 415 as a summary of lines 409–11, on the civic virtues of Melanippus, and line 416 as a summary of lines 412–4, on his autochthony. The two Thebeses are conflated in Eteocles’ description of Melanippus.

The two Thebeses in the outcome

What of the two Thebeses in the outcome? In the defence of the city Eteocles succeeds as general but fails as king. Not only do he and his brother kill each other, but in so doing they bring to an end the dynasty that began with Cadmus. The city organized for defence by the precepts and plan of Eteocles survives; the city sometimes called an anti-Athens, to the extent that this city is the same as the royal dynasty, perishes. Eteocles and Polynices are said to be ἀτέκνοι ‘without children’ (828).⁷¹ The word has been emended or simply bracketed, as by Hutchinson, or accepted as by West.⁷² Whatever the reading should be here, the play assumes the end of the dynasty.⁷³

The question of the Epigonoι in *Seven*⁷⁴

Recently Alex Garvie has argued for allusion to the Epigonoι, the sons of the Seven, in *Seven* and for an ending that he called indeterminate. He begins with the oracle received by Laius, which is recalled by the chorus in these terms:

παλαιγενῆ γὰρ λέγω
 παρβασίαν ὠκύποι-
 νον, αἰῶνα δ’ ἐς τρίτον
 μένειν, Ἀπόλλωνος εὖτε Λάιος
 βία, τρὶς εἰπόντος ἐν
 μεσομάλοισι Πυθικοῖς
 χρηστηρίοις θνήσκοντα γέν-
 νας ἄτερ σῶζειν πόλιν

742–9

For I speak of an ancient
 transgression, soon punished,
 and into the third generation I say
 that it remains, ever since Laius, in spite of Apollo,
 who thrice proclaimed in the mid-navel Pythian

shrine that dying
without off-spring he saves the city, . . .

The next strophe continues: begot Oedipus. Because Laius did not die without off-spring, Apollo's warning will be fulfilled. It will not be fulfilled, however, by the attack of *Seven* but only later, by their sons, the Epigonoι. If the stanza under discussion is read in this way, then at its conclusion the situation is indeterminate. Garvie says:

The clear implication of the oracle was that the safety of Thebes depended on [Laius' dying without off-spring]. In other words, since Laius did in fact procreate Oedipus before he died, the destruction of the city was inevitable; in tragedy one can expect oracles to be fulfilled (*cf.* 844). But by the end of the play there is a general assumption that Thebes has in fact been saved.⁷⁵

But the chorus distinguishes clearly between the swift punishment of Laius' transgression, his death at the hands of his son, which is elaborated in the following antistrophe (750–7), and the persistence of the results of that transgression into the third generation. The sons of Oedipus, the son of Laius, are under Oedipus's curse. This thought frames the second *stasimon*:

str. α I fear that the house-destroying Erinyes of Oedipus fulfills his curses.
ant. α Iron gives them not the great plains but only enough land to lie in.
str. β New misfortunes of the house are mingled with the old.
ant. β For there was the oracle received by Laius that has remained until now.
str. γ Laius begot Oedipus; Oedipus begot Eteocles and Polynices.
ant. γ A wave of ills cloven in three breaks on the city.
str. δ Heavy are the pay-offs of ancient curses.
ant. δ Who was honoured more than Oedipus?
str. ε Unhappy of marriage he blinded himself,
ant. ε and he cursed his sons. I fear that the Erinyes may bring the curse to fulfillment.

So far as the chorus knows, the city might yet be captured or destroyed.

As we know, oracles are fungible in tragedy.⁷⁶ The tragedian adapts them to his immediate needs. The terms of the oracle received by Laius, as reported by the chorus, are, in effect: if you die without off-spring you will save the city. The protasis of the condition 'if you die, etc.' was, one assumes, fixed. The apodosis, 'you will save the city,' sounds like an adaptation to a tragedy in which the saving of the city is the central concern of the women of the chorus and, at the moment in which they are singing these words, far from assured.⁷⁷ It is true that these terms do not cover exactly the events of the generations of Laius and Oedipus because the city was saved even though Laius violated the condition of its safety. He was succeeded as king by his son, who in fact saved Thebes from the predations of the Sphinx. These terms do, however, cover the events

of the third generation: Eteocles and Polynices will die without off-spring and the city will be saved.⁷⁸

Garvie's second passage is from the third stasimon (822–1004), the chorus' lament upon hearing from the Messenger the news of the brothers' death. The strophe in question begins:

ἐξέπραξεν, οὐδ' ἀπεῖ-
πεν πατρόθεν εὐκταία φάτις·
βουλαὶ δ' ἄπιστοι Λαῖου διήρκεσαν.
μέριμνα δ' ἀμφὶ πτόλιν·
θέσφατ' οὐκ ἀμβλύνεται.

840–4

The imprecation that their father uttered
had its result and did not abate.
The untrusting counsels of Laius were fulfilled.
There is lament throughout the city.
The gods' oracles are not dulled.

Garvie discusses the first three of these lines.⁷⁹ He surveys the word μέριμνα in archaic and classical Greek literature and states that he can find no example of its meaning lamentation. 'In most of its occurrences it can be translated by "care, concern, worry, or anxiety."' So 'at 842 we glide almost imperceptibly from the fate of the brothers to the anxiety for the city,' because the oracle has not yet been fulfilled. In his survey he refers to *Agamemnon* line 1531, citing and quoting part of the commentary of Eduard Fraenkel. What Fraenkel says in the part not quoted bears directly on the question of the meaning of μέριμνα in *Seven*: 'μέριμνα here [i.e., in *Ag.*], as elsewhere, stands very close to φροντίς in meaning; both denote 'thought' and cover both the act and its result' (the part emphasized is not quoted by Garvie).⁸⁰ In *Seven*, μέριμνα, in the sense not of thought but of emotional concern, also covers both the act of caring and its result, lamentation. It is *causa pro effectu*. So the absence of examples of μέριμνα in the sense of 'a concern for a specific past event' is beside the point. The strophe states again the main thought of the second stasimon, that the results of Laius' transgression persist into the third generation.

Garvie's third passage is 901–5:

μένει
<δὲ> κτέαν' ἐπιγόνους,
δι' ὧν αἰνομόροις,
δι' ὧν νεῖκος ἔβα καὶ θανάτου τέλος.

West (the text quoted by Garvie)

There remain to their descendants the possessions
for which to the bitter-fated ones
the strife came and the end of death.

If ἐπίγονοι here refers to the sons of Eteocles and Polynices, as it seems that it must, then this passage flatly contradicts the description of the brothers as childless (ἄτεκνους, 828). Hutchinson obelizes the word and West retains it.⁸¹ Even if 'childless' has to go, the fact remains that, discounting, as I have done, Garvie's other two passages, the reference to the sons of Eteocles and Polynices is the only one in *Seven*. More important, it contradicts the chorus' repeated assertions of the end of the Labdacids.⁸² As in the second *stasimon*, summarized earlier, the chorus thinks in terms of three generations, not four (cf. Eteocles: Φοῖβω στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαῖου γένος, 691), and the two brothers are the last one.

Two accounts of the outcome

To continue with the outcome, the play offers two accounts, first from the messenger and then from the chorus. When the messenger arrives with his report of the outcome of the battle, he says that the city has been saved (with anaphora of πόλις, 793, 795). He uses the 'ship of state' metaphor, implicitly confirming the success of Eteocles as the helmsman that Eteocles said that he was (795–6, cf. 2–3). As for the brothers, the messenger says that Apollo has fulfilled 'the old ill counsel of Laius' (801–2).

τὰς δ' ἐβδόμας ὁ σεμνὸς ἐβδομαγέτας
ἄναξ Ἀπόλλων εἴλετ', Οἰδίπου γένει
κραίνων παλαιὰς Λαῖου δυσβουλίας.

The lord Apollo, Leader of the Seventh,
took the seventh gate, fulfilling for the race of Oedipus
the old ill counsel of Laius.⁸³

The ill counsel of Laius was to have a child, against the warning of Apollo. Eteocles and Polynices are the lineal descendants of Laius, and with their deaths his imprudence has been brought to its end in the third generation (cf. the chorus at 743–4).

As for the chorus, although it does not sing of the saving of the city, it keeps the city in mind, preserving to some extent the perspective of the messenger. The chorus says, apropos of the deaths of the brothers: 'There is care throughout the city' (843).⁸⁴ Again 'Groaning pervades the city' (900). Again 'One may say over their bodies that the two of them have done many things in battle to the citizens, many to the destructive ranks of the mercenary foreigners'. Also curiously the chorus refers to Polynices as an 'exile' (979), and it says κατῆλθες 'you returned from exile' (991), a standard expression in fifth-century Athens.

The chorus also maintains its view, expressed earlier, of the attacking army as barbarians (ἐτερόφωνος στρατός, 170; cf. Eteocles' reference to them as ἐπῆλυδες, 34; and to the barbarous sound made by their horses, 463). In other words, the given of the plot, a city under siege by foreigners, is maintained, except that now the city has been saved.

Vindication of Eteocles?

Does this outcome vindicate Eteocles' conception of the city? To some extent it must. His precepts and his plan have been successful. The prayer that he makes at the end of the prologue has been answered in that 'the city at least has been saved'. Let us look at the prayer as a whole, (the first line of which was quoted earlier).

ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῇ καὶ πολιισσοῦχοι θεοί,
 Ἄρά τ' Ἑρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής,
 μή μοι πόλιν γε πρεμνόθεν πανώλεθρον
 ἐκθαμνίσῃτε δηάλωτον, Ἑλλάδος
 [φθόγγον χέουσαν, καὶ δόμους ἐφεστίους·]
 ἐλευθέραν δὲ γῆν τε καὶ Κάδμου πόλιν
 ζεύγλῃσι δουλίῃσι μήποτε σχεθεῖν·
 γένεσθε δ' ἄλκῃ· ξυνὰ δ' ἐλπίζω λέγειν·
 πόλις γὰρ εὖ πράσσουσα δαίμονας τίει.

69–77 Hutchinson⁸⁵

Oh Zeus and Earth and gods who protect the city, and Curse the mighty Erinys of my father, do not extirpate my city at least (i.e., no matter what happens to me), root and branch, destroyed, captive, and never hold a free land and the city of Cadmus in the yoke of slavery. Be our defence. I hope to be saying what is in our common interest. For when a city fares well it honours the gods.

His invocation is in two parts, one to the divinities named in the first line, the other to Curse the Erinys of his father, and his two petitions, one negative (71–2), the other positive (74–5), correspond to the two parts of the invocation. The negative petition refers specifically to the results that the curse on him might have for the city that he is defending, and Eteocles makes appropriate use, for apotropaic purposes, of formulaic curse terms (extirpation, total destruction).⁸⁶ The positive petition (stated positively and then negatively) refers to another possible result (the city survives but is enslaved) and is implicitly addressed to the gods ('keep the city free'). The summation ('Be our defence') is also addressed to the gods, as is the remark on the benefit to them of continued sacrifice, which they will not have if this city is destroyed or enslaved (76–7).⁸⁷ He has obviously not been able to avert his father's curse, which is really the theme of the chorus in the concluding section, apart from the references to the *polis* commented on earlier, as it was in the second *stasimon*.

There is something else in his prayer that bears on the question of the vindication of Eteocles. He invokes Zeus and Earth and the city-holding gods. The chorus, however, in their invocation at the start of the concluding section, invoke 'Zeus and the city-holding gods,' omitting Earth. Earth as a divinity and no doubt Eteocles' ideology of mother earth are forgotten. They are aspects of the negative Thebes, which now, with the extinction of the royal dynasty, is finished. The earth is now nothing but the place in which the brothers are buried.

πέπαιται δ' ἔχθος, ἐν δὲ γαῖα
ζόα φονορῦτον
μέμεικται· κάρτα δ' εἶσ' ὅμαιμοι.

937–40⁸⁸

The hatred is over. In the blood-reeking earth
their life is mingled. They are truly of the same blood.

Earth destroys even their separate identities.⁸⁹

Vindication of the women of the chorus against Eteocles?

Is it the case, then, that the end of *Seven* vindicates the women of the chorus against Eteocles? An affirmative answer is suggested by the following considerations. The Thebes that has survived is politically now a vacuum, and the interpolator who added the part about Antigone had to introduce a male administrative committee (πρόβουλοι, 1006) for her to challenge. The women of the chorus, in the part of the concluding section generally considered genuine, occupy, for the purposes of the tragedy, this vacuum. Even if they are in no sense rulers, they are what remains of the city. Nothing more is heard of the champions who defended the walls. To put it another way, the women of the chorus occupy the stage from which Eteocles earlier had tried to banish them.

This affirmative answer concerning the women is qualified by some other observations. In tragedy, lamentation is not just grief, but it is also political.⁹⁰ In this tragedy, the modification of the standard funeral lament, as demonstrated by Gregory Hutchinson, might point to a particular agenda. Is it a political agenda? If so, it does not seem to be the chorus' vindication of itself against Eteocles. The chorus never asserts or implies that its role is specifically a regained privilege of women. The chorus' theme is in fact the fulfilment of the curse of Oedipus. In the very last segment of the play considered genuine, the semi-chorus' refrain, 'black Erinyes, you are in truth a mighty one' (μέλαιν' Ἐρινύς, ἥ μεγασθενής τις εἶ, 977, 988), explicitly echoes and confirms Eteocles' prayer at the end of the prologue: 'Curse, the mighty Erinyes of my father' (Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινύς πατρός ἡ μεγασθενής, 70).

Drama and dramaturgy

As with their corrective echo of the first line of Eteocles' prayer, they are not echoing something that they have heard, because presumably they were not yet on stage when Eteocles uttered his prayer. They are echoing something that Aeschylus composed. So we have to think of communication by Aeschylus to the audience – of something about the women, not of the women's communication of something about themselves to each other and/or to an imagined audience internal to the drama. For this kind of Aeschylean communication one can compare Eteocles' command to the chorus in the first episode: go inside (201). In the drama, in the action represented on stage, this command makes sense: Eteocles would like to

be rid of the chorus, and the chorus knows it. At the level of dramaturgy, that is, the representation of the dramatic action, the command is impossible. After its entrance, a chorus in a Greek tragedy remains on stage. Here we have one of those conflicts of drama and dramaturgy to which I referred in an article on *Seven* of some years ago.⁹¹ It is also of course impossible for the chorus in *Seven* to remain silent for the rest of the play.

Larger political dimension

Even if there is no self-vindication of the chorus, its lamentation could still have a larger political dimension. The very theme of the curse and the Erinyes could be political in the sense that this most recent atrocity is the final one. The city has a new start. As I have said, I think that there is no intimation of the Epigonoι, no intimation of a next generation.⁹² Nor is there any hint of the cult of Eteocles and Polynices to which Pausanias refers (9.18.3) or of a continuing power of the Erinyes of Oedipus.⁹³ Everything in the chorus' final songs has to do with the finality of the mutual fratricide.

τελευτᾷ δ' αἶδ' ἐπηλάλαξαν
Ἄραι τὸν ὄζυν νόμον, τετραμμένον
παντρόπῳ φυγᾷ γένους.

953–55 West

In the end these Curses raised the war cry,
a piercing melody, the family turned
to flight in complete rout.

Seven does not give any indication of what the new start might be. In this general sense, I can agree with Garvie that the ending of the tragedy is indeterminate. But contrary to the version of the myth that continues with the Epigonoι, this indeterminacy is positive. The *polis*, even if its new constitution is indeterminate, is free of the Labdacids. The citizens are no longer the 'citizens of Cadmus' in the same sense in which Eteocles addressed them as such in the first line of the play. Although there are still descendants of the Sown Men in the population, they are already, if the example of Melanippus serves, ethically domesticated.

Seven, the *Oresteia*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and fifth-century mythological thinking

In the matter of the Erinyes one can compare *Seven* with the end of the *Oresteia*. In *Seven*, the *polis*, in surviving and in some as yet undetermined sense superseding the royal dynasty, has simply left the Erinyes behind. In *Eumenides* the Erinyes hunt down Orestes after he has killed his mother. But Athena intervenes and has the case of Orestes decided before a court in Athens. In the end the Erinyes are partly transformed, and a larger transformation is foreseen in their acceptance into cult

at Athens, where they will have a new positive function of rewarding those who honour them (cf. the agreement between Athena and Erinyes at 903–26). In short, they will become Eumenides instead of Erinyes, the name by which they are still known in *Eumenides* (331, 344, 512, 950).⁹⁴ In sum, the *polis* domesticates the Erinyes in cult and asserts its own justice, in the form of the trial before a court, as superior to that of the Erinyes.⁹⁵ In both the trilogies, then, the Theban one and the *Oresteia*, the *polis* replaces the ‘primitive vengeance’ going on within the ruling family, in the case of the *Oresteia* with a specific institution.⁹⁶

Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* also subordinates the Erinyes of Oedipus to the interests of the *polis*. (As Polynices knows, he has the Erinyes of his father pursuing him: 1298–1300, 1432–4.) The innovations of Sophocles in this tragedy are to bring Oedipus to Colonus, to locate his grave there,⁹⁷ and to move the scene of the curse geographically from Thebes to Colonus and temporally from earlier to later, in fact to the moment when the Argives are outside the walls of Thebes. In this way, the curse becomes the first example of Oedipus’ promised power to punish the Thebans, even if they are not, at this moment, the enemies of Athens. The Erinyes of Oedipus are thus, through his association with the Eumenides, coordinated with the best interests of his new city. (In effect Oedipus has invoked the Erinyes of the local cult to support his own Erinyes, which he has activated with this curse. Whereas the Coloneans euphemistically call them the Eumenides [42, 486], they are in their negative aspect the Erinyes.)⁹⁸ It is another instance, then, of the accommodation of the Erinyes to the *polis*, as in Aeschylus.

The comparisons between *Seven* and the *Oresteia* and *Oedipus at Colonus* that have been made here with respect to the Erinyes can be and in fact have been made in larger terms. These works have a common vision. When the ruling houses of Mycenae and of Thebes fall, they fall after a transgenerational series of oracles, curses, and appearances of the Erinyes, bidden or unbidden.⁹⁹ In Pindar, the Erinyes of Laius are activated at the sight of Oedipus’ patricide, and they cause the death of Oedipus’ off-spring (*Ol.* 2. 38–42, 476 B.C.E.).¹⁰⁰ The outcome of the war and the end of *Seven*, that is, without the interpolation after line 1004, can be seen in this large context.

Notes

- 1 E.g. Winnington-Ingram 1985:284 ‘he is at once ‘lord of the Cadmeans,’ leading the defence of his native city, and ‘son of Oedipus,’ lying under his father’s curse which he is bound to fulfil in the mutual fratricide.’ Cf. Thalmann 1978:31–32. As for interpretation of the tragedy that is based on the character of Eteocles, see the reservations of Thalmann 1978: App. 3 (‘The Character and Freedom of Eteocles’) and of Hutchinson 1985:xxxiv.
- 2 Vidal-Naquet 1979:97, Giordano 2006b:55 and n.8 for bibliography on the question, consequent on the divided character of Eteocles, of the unity of the tragedy. Cf. Stehle 2005:101 ‘the central conundrum of the play, Eteocles’ sudden change of attitude when he hears that Polyneikes is at the seventh gate’; cf. 102 n.7 for a bibliography; also 117. The analysis of Eteocles’ motives by Hutchinson (1985:148–50) seems to me accurate. DeVito 1999 discusses necessity in the thought of Eteocles: ‘Eteocles, although subject to his father’s Curse, ultimately makes the decision to go to the

seventh gate of his own will. Eteocles' dash to the seventh gate, then, is neither the act of a man utterly maddened by the Curse, . . . , nor of a man irrevocably trapped by fate. Rather it is the crowning statement of the idea expressed in Eteocles' first scene with the Chorus and in the Scout's account of Amphiaraus' decision, the idea that since it is vain to attempt to escape one's fate, a man must meet what awaits him in the most honorable way possible' (170–1). Lawrence 2007 is the most thorough of recent discussions of Eteocles' motives. He concludes: 'Eteocles' moral awareness is remarkable in both its recognition of the Fury-inspired *ἄτα* referred to by the chorus and its ability to survive it. His decision to accept and enact his fated destiny is obviously rational and correct, while a normal horror at the prospect of fratricide could serve no useful purpose in a situation where a warrior's courage is the most useful mental state. The negative aspect of the tragedy of Eteocles (as of Sophocles' Oedipus) consists in a destiny which dooms him to offend against kin; the positive aspect (as for Oedipus) is the courage and clear-sightedness with which he accepts that destiny.'

- 3 As Giordano 2006a points out, *Seven* has usually been read as a drama of the *genos* rather than of the *polis*. Eteocles in particular is seen as the accursed son of Oedipus rather than as a political and military leader.
- 4 Lupaş and Petre 1981:9–11, Hutchinson 1985:52 on lines 62–4, Brock 2013:55, 113.
- 5 Wiles 1997:213. In keeping with this position, Wiles holds that in the prologue there was no group of extras representing the three age groups of male citizens (115).
- 6 West 2006: on lines 6–7 (which he translates 'It is Eteocles alone who would be bruited round the town / by the citizens with murderous preludes'): 'Preludes to what? Obviously to active revolt. . . . [I]f the whole city should turn against him, he could hardly hope to remain in power.' West discusses also the reference to the demos at lines 199–200. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1983:20–1 on the 'polis theme.' Thalmann 1978:31–61 discusses imagery related to the city as distinguished from the brothers.
- 7 I accept the inversion of the order of lines 12 and 13 in the manuscripts which was proposed by A.Y. Campbell and has been defended by the three most recent commentators. The scholia on these lines, as Campbell pointed out, refer to three classes of citizens. See Campbell 1931, Lupaş and Petre 1981:15–16 on lines 10–16, Hutchinson 1985:44–5 on lines 11–13, Centanni 1995:124–5 on lines 11–13. Hermann 2013:41–4 retains the order of the mss., arguing that Eteocles is addressing two groups. The difficulty for this view that is posed by line 12 (βλαστημὸν ἀλδαίνοντα σώματος πολύν) is not addressed by Hermann (cf. his n.13). Cf. the Hutchinson n. just cited, second paragraph. West 1990:97–9, defending the order of lines in the received text, faces the difficulty and states that line 12 must be read as 'referring to those who are "old and fat" or "old and flabby,"' explaining that 'People do, after all, more often grow fatter with advancing years than thinner.' The connective τε after the first word of line 12 in the reordered lines is found in the second hand of M and in several other mss. (listed in Page's app. crit.). The variously emended ὥστ' of the mss. at the end of the line does not affect the point concerning three groups. Hutchinson reads ὥς τε following Deniston 1966:527 and translates 'and everyone who is in the prime of life and nurses, as belongs naturally to that age, an abundant growth of body.' For the agricultural metaphor in Eteocles' description of the age groups: Cameron 1971:85–7.
- 8 In the prologue of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* three age groups, old men, boys, and young men, can be seen to be represented. Thus Kamerbeek 1967:35 on lines 17–18, Longo 2007 [1972]:105 on lines 14–21, Bollack 1990.2:19 on lines 15–19 (comparing *Seven* prologue). Cf. Condello 2009:136–7 n.4 for bibliography. Other divisions of the mute persons have been proposed: see the commentators just cited.
- 9 Lanza 1977:61–3 (citing Vidal-Naquet 1968, which I am citing in its revised version, Vidal-Naquet 1986). In fact, of course, the champions are μονόμαχοι 'warriors fighting in single combat' (798).
- 10 Eteocles has an ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης on his shield (466). On Eteocles as a doublet of Eteocles: Vidal-Naquet 1979:115.

- 11 The term is used five times in Plato *Apology* 28d6-e29a1 and τάξις 'battle rank' once; cf. *Laches* 190e5–6, 191a1–3. See also Demosthenes 18 (*On the Crown*) 62, 138, 173, 192, 221, 304, 320; also 3.36; 15.32. See Wankel 1976:379 on 62. On 173 Rehdantz and Blass 1890:109 suggest that Dem. is alluding to Aeschines' charge that Dem. abandoned his post at the battle of Chaeronea (Aeschines 3.181: ὁ τὴν τάξιν λιπὼν 'leaving the battle rank'). Eteocles also uses ἀντιτάττω 'draw up in battle order against' (395, 408, 621) and προστάττω 'assign' (527). On these τάττω compounds see Allison 2013:569–70.
- 12 The first Theban champion, Melanippus, honours the throne of *Aischynē* (409–10). Melanippus is discussed in what follows in the text of this article. For further discussion on issues of military realism for an Athenian audience, see Echeverría, in this volume.
- 13 Cairns 1993:181–3. '[H]e hopes that the *kakon* to which he proceeds may occur without *aischynē*, but this hope can hardly be fulfilled when the *kakon* involves his facing his own brother in battle' (182).
- 14 Hutchinson 1985:111 on line 409 compares Thuc. 1.84.3 (Archidamus) on the Spartans: their bravery comes from a sense of shame (αἰδώς and αἰσχύνη; cf. Cairns 1993:358n.44); Thuc. 2.43.1 (Pericles) (not cited in Cairns 1993). Hutchinson: '[T]he Thebans all share the same qualities, in which they are opposed to all the Argives.'
- 15 Hutchinson 1985:121 on line 477: 'The extension found here is familiar to Athenian patriotism,' citing Lysias and Plato. The passage in Lysias and others are quoted by Cameron 1971:90–5 in a discussion of the 'patriotic version of γηροτροφία ['caring for the old']'.
- 16 Thalmann 1978:39: 'the Argives – loud, violent, and alien to the land'; Guidorizzi 2002:66 and n.12. Giordano 2006a, in a detailed comparison of *Seven* with the *Iliad*, shows that the Argives are still Homeric while the Thebans are up to date.
- 17 For a sketch of the history of the Cleisthenic army, see Vidal-Naquet 1986.
- 18 Meiggs and Lewis 26; Hansen 2(iii); 'Simonides' XX (b) *FGE* (pp. 219–25).
- 19 Trans. by Bowie 2010:365. Matthaiou 2003:200 proposes that ἀνχιάλομ, which is usually connected with ἄστυ (although not by Bowie) be transcribed as ἀνχιάλον <sic>, gen. plur. modifying πολὺν. 'It follows that the adjective ἀνχιάλον <sic> gives us a clear indication for the location of πόλαι near the seashore.'
- 20 Matthaiou 1988 (p. 121 for a reconstruction); argument that it is a funerary monument, a cenotaph, in Matthaiou 2003:195–7. Cf. Keesling 2010:116–17. As for what was on the stelae: *IG I³* p. 494: *utrum de anaglyphis an picturis an titulis nomina exhibentibus agatur . . . incertum manet.*
- 21 But Page in *FGE* pp. 222–3: does not refer to a list of names; perhaps to a general legend referring to Athenians who died at Marathon and in the war of 480/79 BCE; perhaps it is only the deictic conventional in epigrams.
- 22 Matthaiou 2003:197–8. But Page in *FGE* p. 220: It should not be called a cenotaph, 'for that term should be reserved for memorials for bodies not recovered for burial.'
- 23 Petrovic 2007:164.
- 24 But Page in *FGE* p. 221: 'The gates are the gates of Athens . . .,' with argument.
- 25 ἐπειδὴ σφιν πρὸς τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους κακῶς ἡ αἰχμὴ ἐστήκεε (7.152.4), where ἴσθημι is intransitive. (Hdt. reports the belief that the Argives invited the Persians to invade Greece because the Argives' war with the Spartans had gone badly for them.) I have taken these parallels from Petrovic 2007:171.
- 26 Page in *FGE* p. 221: 'the meaning is the same as in the much commoner phrase . . . ὅπλα θέσθαι.'
- 27 For a survey of opinion cf. Hornblower 1991:135 on Thuc. 1.89.3–93.2.
- 28 Loser to Simonides: *Vit. Aesch.* p. 332.7–8 OCT Page. Marathon veteran (also Salamis and Plataea): pp. 331.10–13 OCT Page. There is reference to Marathon also in the epitaph of Aeschylus: pp. 332.24–27 OCT Page. Sommerstein 2010b:195–201 argues that the epitaph was composed by a contemporary of Aeschylus.

- 29 This list combines the lists of Vanderpool 1966:106, West 1969:9. Vanderpool published the marble column, whose reused blocks and Ionic capital he discerned in the remains of a medieval fort at Marathon.
- 30 *IG* I³.3; 1015bis. On the latter, cf. Matthaiou 2003:190–4.
- 31 Besides the statue at Delphi, also the painting in the Stoa Poikilē. Blamire 1989:102–4 on Cimon's obvious interest in 'promoting Marathon, in order to achieve the rehabilitation of his father's memory'; on the prominence of Miltiades in the two works; on the degree of Cimon's personal involvement in the commissioning of these works.
- 32 Gomme et al. 2012. For a useful overview of the history of the scholarship which these authors are opposing, see Stein-Hölkeskamp 1999, who affirms that in his foreign policy Cimon was not pro-Spartan. From a detailed review of the sources for Cimon down to Plutarch, she concludes (163–4) that despite his aristocratic image Cimon did not oppose the democracy. There remain of course the facts of his opposition to the reforms of Ephialtes and his ostracism.
- 33 Plut. *Cimon* 12.2 on an innovation by Cimon in the trireme at the Battle of the Eurymedon (a year, it is debated which one, in the first half of the decade of the 460s): πρὸς μὲν τάχος ἂν' ἀρχῆς καὶ περιαγωγῇν ὑπὸ Θεμιστοκλέους ἄριστα κατασκευασμέναις, ἐκεῖνος δὲ τότε καὶ πλατυτέρας ἐποίησεν αὐτάς, καὶ διάβασιν τοῖς καταστρώμασιν ἔδωκεν, ὥς ἂν ὑπὸ πολλῶν ὀπλιτῶν μαχιμώτεροι προσφέροιντο τοῖς πολέμοις. Gomme 1962:287 on 1.100.1 comments: 'from the beginning optimally designed by Themistocles for speed and manoeuvrability, and he (Cimon) at that time made them broader and put a gangway on the decks in order that with many hoplites on board they might attack the enemy more effectively.' Gomme asks if Cimon really did make this change or does Plutarch's statement come from the 'biased and ill-judging' Theopompus so that it is only 'part of the conventional picture of Themistokles the demagogue who must anticipate every development of the democratic fleet . . . and the good conservative Kimon, who, though in fact most of his triumphs were at sea, must always be joined with the hoplite class'? Blamire 1989:139–40 does not doubt the historicity of Plutarch in the matter of Cimon's redesign of the trireme. (Blamire does not refer to Gomme.) Hornblower 1991:153–4 on the great impression made by this battle. He cites *inter alia* the epigram at Diod. 11.62.
- 34 Wallace 1985:84.
- 35 The epigram: Blamire 1989:190. Fourth-century: Loraux 1973.
- 36 Trans. by Sommerstein 1996:117.
- 37 For the comparison of the Aristophanic Aeschylus and Stronger Argument cf. Scharffenberger 2007:232–3. Epic colouring: for θυμοῦς ἐπταβοείους cf. the shield of Ajax (Hom. *Il.* 7.219–23).
- 38 Trans. by Sommerstein 1982:105.
- 39 Sommerstein 1996:273. Dover 1993 *ad loc.* does not comment on this matter.
- 40 Gelzer 1960:26–31 defined this part as lines 895–1098. Dover 1993 uses most of the traditional German terminology (systematized and elaborated on by Gelzer) for the nine parts of the epirrhematic *agōn* but not all of it. For a non-technical overview of the contest and the question of Aristophanes' view: Griffith 2012:100–14.
- 41 See Dover 1993:31–2. Aloni 2002:96–7 suggests that some in the audience might have found humour in the 'citation' of Gorgias and that, at the same time, the idea of a tragedy 'full of Ares' was comical in itself.
- 42 For an extensive bibliography see Scharffenberger 2007:233n.11. Scharffenberger, pointing out resemblances of Aeschylus to the Paphlagonian, argues for ambivalence on Aristophanes' part.
- 43 On the problem of this awareness (i.e. how did Aristophanes' audience know whatever it knew about Aeschylus' tragedies?), see Scharffenberger 2007:229 and nn.2–3. Lech 2008 proposes reperformance in a year between 411 BCE (when the tragedy is referred to in *Lysistrata* but without its title) and the year of *Frogs* (405 BCE).

- 44 Stehle 2005:101 and n.3. Stehle argues that Eteocles' interruption of the chorus' entrance song is transgressive, a violation of *euphēmia*. 'His intervention creates the reverse situation from what he thinks it is: he causes religious danger to the citizens.' Stehle presupposes that the chorus as it enters is engaged in a 'ritual' and that a rule of *euphēmia* (not mentioned in the text) applies: 'An ancient audience . . . must have noticed' whether or not it was observed (104). Cameron 1971:33 said the opposite: the women 'in their heedless excitement as they address the gods, . . . are likely to utter an adverse omen.' 'It is imperative that Eteocles control them.'
- 45 For the text and the unaccented existential ἐστί, see West 1990:111.
- 46 This passage was brought to my attention by Mark Griffith in his talk at the conference on *Seven* at Notre Dame University on Sept. 2, 2015. See Griffith, 137–8, in this volume, for further discussion of this passage.
- 47 Saunders 1997:1481.
- 48 Ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἀγίων, αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν, οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν· ἀλλὰ ὑποτασσέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει. εἰ δέ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἴκῳ τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας ἐπερωτάτωσαν, αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἐστὶν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ (*Corinthians* 1 14:34–5). 'Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing <sic>, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church' (King James Bible). Calvin in his commentary on these two verses understands the women's speaking in church to be a matter of their teaching, which, he argues, is 'not suitable to the station that a woman occupies, because, if she teaches, she presides over all the men, while it becomes her to be *under subjection*.'
- 49 Giordano-Zecharya 2006b analyzes the difference between Eteocles and the women in the context of fifth-century *polis* religion ('hoplite civic religiosity,' with sacrifice and prayer, as against supplication and lament).
- 50 On problems of the 'not-quite-strophic pattern' of the dochmiacs, see Stehle 2005:105–6.
- 51 Troy: Lupaş and Petre 1981:100, Hutchinson 1985:89–91.
- 52 See Hutchinson 1985:83 on line 232. Bibliography on misogyny of Eteocles at Vidal-Naquet 1979:99 n.16. See Foley 1993:131–4, with full discussion of earlier views of the matter. More recently Giordano 2006b:67: 'Opposing the women, Eteocles seems more prompted by the interest of the *polis* than by his idiosyncratic misogyny.' For a helpful overview of the question: Torrance 2007:94–101.
- 53 Segal 1981:378–85, Vidal-Naquet 1986, Zeitlin 1990a, Hose 1995:98 and n.49 for earlier bibliography. For critiques of the view that Thebes is an anti-Athens: Bernardini 2000:221–2, Cerri 2000:259–63, Easterling 2005:45n.27 for further bibliography; Giordano 2006a:278. Easterling 2005:57: 'The notion of its antiquity intensifies the horror of wiping out a civilized community and its sacred places' (and context).
- 54 Cited by Benardete 1967:28, with *Il.* 15.662–3 (Nestor to the Achaeans), apropos of Eteocles' 'unqualified devotion to the country.' For other *topoi* in this *parainesis* see Belloni 1988:173 on lines 395–407.
- 55 Hutchinson 1985:45 on *Se.* 14–16 cites Eur. *Heracl.* 826–7, where the messenger, reporting the battle between the Heraclids and the Athenians, on one side, and the Argives, on the other, quotes the Athenian general's exhortation, which is limited to a single element, the earth: Ὡς ὑμπολιται, τῇ τε βοσκούσῃ χθονὶ / καὶ τῇ τεκούσῃ νῦν τιν' ἀρκέσαι χρεών.
- 56 Wiles 1997:198–9 citing Wiles 1993. Already Thalmann 1978:88–9, followed by Centanni 1995:215–16 (with diagram).
- 57 Cadmus killed the dragon with a stone or a sword (Pherecydes fr. 88 Fowler; stone: Hellanicus fr. 96 Fowler).
- 58 Eur. *El.* 1258–62 (explicitly) and *IT* 943–46 (implicitly). Hellanicus *FGrHist* 323a F1 = Fowler *38 and 323a F22a = Fowler 169 followed this etymology. For fourth-century and

- later sources see Wallace 1985:231n.28. Aesch. *Eum.* 685–90 is an alternate etymology. Wallace 1985:9n.28 cites the places in Eur. et al. The temple referred to by Paus. (1.8.5) was moved from some other site to the Areopagus in the time of Augustus. See Wallace 1985:213 on this point. Wallace also argues, following Chantraine, that the first element of the name Areopagus is derived from the (unattested) positive degree of ἀρείων ‘better,’ which appears in a Homeric formula describing a wall (*Il.* 4.407, 15.736).
- 59 SEG xxi 519; Rhodes and Robin Osborne 2003:no. 88. Ares is one of several war deities who are invoked, along with other deities, cult heroes, the boundaries of the fatherland, and various agricultural products. On this array see Torrance 2014b:113–14, 117. Bayliss 2013:16–21 discusses the particular relevance of each deity to the oath.
- 60 Benardete 1967:23–4. His way of posing the question abstracts from the identity of Ares as a god of Thebes and as a progenitor in two senses of the Thebans (the teeth of his dragon given to Cadmus to sow and the father of Harmonia, the wife of Cadmus).
- 61 Zeus gives Cadmus Harmonia, the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite (Hellanicus fr. 51 Fowler; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.2; Hes. *Theog.* 933–37, 975; Theogn. 937).
- 62 Agave, Ino, and Autonoë tear Pentheus to pieces in Eur. *Bacch.* Semele was destroyed by a bolt of lightning, Zeus’ response to her rash request for his revelation of himself.
- 63 Vian 1963:199. *Thebaid* fr. 2.2–3 B = fr. 2.2–3 D: Oedipus has a silver table that was Cadmus’s. For the dynasty: Hdt. 3.59; Soph. *OT* 267–68; Eur. *Phoen.* 5–9. Where the founding of Thebes by Amphion and Zethus fits in – before Cadmus? after Cadmus? – is a problem. See Fowler 2000–2013.2:225–6, 351–4.
- 64 Polydorus as son of Cadmus: Hes. *Theog.* 975–78; Eur. *Phoen.* 7–8.
- 65 Aloni 2002:100–3.
- 66 Kearns 2012:598 (i.e. in the article in *OCD*⁴, from which I have also borrowed some phrases).
- 67 Would ἄσταχυς ‘ear of corn’ have been heard in Ἀστακός? If so, in κεδνὸν Ἀστακοῦ τόκον one has already the A–B pattern of the speech as a whole.
- 68 Synonym of Aidōs: Cairns 1993:182n.11. *Aischron* occurs three times in the *Iliad*, always to describe ‘a situation in which martial prestige is at stake’: Cairns 1993:60.
- 69 Of course he also stands in sharp moral contrast to his opponent, Tydeus, on whom see Torrance 2007:70–3.
- 70 Hutchinson 1985:111–2 on line 409. Cairns 1993:182n.11: ‘The primary reference is surely to the moral superiority of the defenders over their Argive opponents,’ against Winnington-Ingram 1983:31, who assumes that the virtues of Melanippus are those of the warrior concerned with his honour.
- 71 Sommerstein 2010b:83 observes that on the evidence of *Seven* Eteocles was probably not married (esp. lines 188, 195), whereas Polynices probably was. Note 3 on this page gives a list of the sources for the Epigonoι tradition.
- 72 ἀτέκνοις is bracketed by Hutchinson (see his app. crit. for some emendations and Hutchinson 1985:185 on line 828 for discussion); not by West.
- 73 Hutchinson 1985:167 on line 749.
- 74 For further discussion of this issue, see also Sommerstein in this volume.
- 75 Garvie 2014:24.
- 76 Hutchinson 1985:xxviii.
- 77 In the simple form of the oracle, as reported by Jocasta in Soph. *OT* 711–14, 852–54, Laius is told that if he has a son he will die by that son’s hands. Survey of the various attested forms of this oracle in Parke and Wormell 1956.1:298–300; nos. 148–9; 372 in vol. 2.
- 78 Centanni 1995:194 on line 815.
- 79 Garvie 2014:26–30.
- 80 Fraenkel 1962.3:725.
- 81 Hutchinson 1985:185 on line 828: ‘To die without off-spring is certainly a misfortune, but that idea appears much too abruptly here.’ West 1990:119–20 discusses lines 820–28 but without comment on the word in question here.

- 82 Easterling 2005:56 on the avoidance of the name Thebes in *Seven* as perhaps a way of avoiding recollection of the Epigonoι, who are referred to in *Iliad* 4.405–9 where the city is 'Thebes.'
- 83 For the pervasive importance of the number seven in this tragedy and for its context in contemporary mathematical ideas, see Allison 2009.
- 84 Hutchinson 1985:187 on line 843.
- 85 Neither cited nor discussed in Pulleyn 1997, who refers only to *Seven* 179–80 (34) and only in passing.
- 86 As pointed out by Fraenkel 1962.2:272–3. For Oedipus' use of such terms in *OT*, see Edmunds 2012:74–9, 80–1.
- 87 Stehle 2005:113–15 holds that Eteocles' prayer is 'self-defeating' and that it 'risks drawing disaster down on all without his recognizing it.'
- 88 Reading, with Hutchinson and West, ζῶα (Attic ζῶή).
- 89 Cf. 949–50. Benardete 1968:16n.28: 'Earth, which is at first identified with the city (16, 74), is gradually made more and more distinct from the city (cf. 522), until it simply becomes the earth on which Eteocles and Polynices shed their blood and in which they will be buried (939, 950, 1002, cf. 585–8).' In the rest of this note Benardete is going on the assumption that the part of *Seven* after 1004 is genuine.
- 90 Foley 1993.
- 91 Edmunds 2002:109–11. Cf. within lyric the phenomenon Hutchinson 1985:96 on line 320 calls 'double perspective.' Another example might be *Seven* 454, where the chorus uses 'coltish' in reference to itself.
- 92 Despite contradiction with the fact that Aeschylus wrote an *Epigonoι*. Cf. Vian 1963:178 for other examples of this kind of inconsistency in the oeuvre of Sophocles and Euripides. For further discussion of how Aeschylus omits any reference to the Epigonoι and yet encourages his audience to consider that the destruction of Thebes is yet to come, see Sommerstein in this volume.
- 93 The Aegids of Sparta were instructed by the Delphic oracle to found a cult of the Erinyes of Oedipus and Laius (Hdt. 4.149.2). Cf. Edmunds 1981:225–6.
- 94 Sommerstein 1989:11–2 on the name. The cult described in *Eumenides* is the cult of the Semnai Theai. Aeschylus, probably the first to identify these goddesses as the Erinyes, in effect provides an action for the cult in Athens. Cf. Sommerstein 1989:10–1.
- 95 The extent and the exact kind of transformation of the Eumenides achieved at the end of this tragedy are matters that would require further discussion. See Easterling 2008 for a survey of previous opinion and for thoughtful proposals.
- 96 Sommerstein 1989:183.
- 97 Probably before the grave of Oedipus came to be located in the sacred space of the Eumenides on the northeast side of the Areopagus (for which location Paus. 1.28.7) is the source. Brief overviews: Henrichs 1994:41–2, Edmunds 1996:140–1, Nagy 2013:508 with n.66 for bibliography on the two competing tombs of Oedipus.
- 98 Cf. schol. *OC* 1568 (ὁ χθόνιαι θεαί): ὁ Ἐρινύες. (Cf. δεινῶτες 84.) They still have this name in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. Aeschylus does not call them Eumenides despite the title of the tragedy.
- 99 Fowler 2013:432–3 speaks of an 'ancestral curse,' but cf. West 1999 on this notion.
- 100 In Pindar's version of the myth, it continues with the Epigonoι, of whom Pindar's *laudandus* Theron is a descendant. On Pindar's engagement with the Seven against Thebes myth, see Foster in this volume.

7 The music of war in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*

Mark Griffith

Introduction: war and music in classical Greece

War was an integral component of fifth-century Greek life, both (for men) in the form of active participation in war-making as a soldier or sailor and (for everyone) in terms of direct or indirect encounters with the deadly and painful consequences of war. Whether in the context of *polis* versus *polis* conflicts or of incursions between Greeks and ‘barbarians’ over access to and acquisition of raw materials, grain, slaves, and the like, it was expected that most citizen men at various points in their life would serve as hoplites or light-armed infantry in a battle-line and/or as rowers in a war-fleet and that all families would suffer from time to time individual losses or traumas caused by war, even while they would also be conscious that a high proportion of their domestic and industrial slaves had been acquired from other places by force. The public and private celebration of victories and of soldiers who had died nobly in battle is well documented in the hundreds of grave monuments, epigrams, literary descriptions, and visual representations of battle-scenes from all over Greece – especially, of course, from Athens, whose ‘epigraphic habit’ was exceptional and whose vase painters, sculptors, and playwrights alike disseminated their work widely, both geographically and diachronically, so that later generations have been able to recapture their experience and points of view. Epideictic oratory (e.g. Athens’ annual Funeral Oration), recitations of heroic epic (most notably, Homer’s *Iliad*), and funerary epigrams by Simonides and many others (mostly anonymous) all provide famous examples from what was clearly an enormous repertoire of commemorative documents and events.

Fifth-century Greeks were also very musical, of course. Occasions for public and private musical performance were numerous and are relatively well-documented for modern scholars to study. Music played a significant role in children’s and adolescents’ education and physical training, in religious ceremonies of all kinds (sacrifices, prayers, weddings, adolescent coming-of-age ceremonies, funerals, etc.), at festival competitions, at work, at dinners and symposia, and even in warfare (as we shall see shortly). Like most peoples in the history of human civilization (and even before) the Greeks employed singing, percussive effects, and melodic instruments as an accompaniment to and enhancement of social interactions of all kinds and as a mood-altering form of communication.¹ And of course the Theatre of Dionysus

at Athens was one of the most intensely and brilliantly innovative and expansive musical venues in the whole of Greece.

So how did these two dynamics interface in ‘real’ Greek life and in the artificial realm of Greek tragedy? In what ways was Greek war-making accompanied and enhanced, or mimetically represented, by music? And in what ways were the consequences of war (death, suffering, loss, devastation, slavery; or triumph, glory, conquest, domination) described, mitigated, or otherwise dealt with through musical performance?

In general (i.e. in comparative terms), even while the vast majority of musical occasions and applications in all societies tend to involve peaceful, cooperative, and even affection-inducing (we might say, ‘harmonious’) human or human–divine interactions, warlike music is possible and indeed is not uncommon. In the modern era, we may think of many contexts and occasions on which music has preceded, accompanied, or closely followed military combat. Musical signals made by bugle, trumpet, or drums (whether or not we classify these as ‘music’) have been part of innumerable battle scenarios.² In the preliminaries before battle, J. P. Sousa’s marches or the percussion-heavy tunes that accompanied Ottoman armies in earlier times or the skirling bagpipes favoured by Scottish clans and their military regiments have all in their day contributed to building a mood of aggression, or at least of camaraderie and concerted action, among the troops. Likewise militaristic songs, such as *La Marseillaise* or *Rule Britannia*, have been effective on many occasions in building up nationalistic or institutional fervour.³

Much celebratory war music is quite crude and banal, if we judge it by strictly musical/aesthetic criteria. An egregious example is Beethoven’s ‘Battle Symphony’ (Op. 91, composed in 1813 to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon at Vitoria);⁴ and hundreds of movie soundtracks might be cited whose chief purpose is to stir a general mood of patriotism or military zeal (or pure aggression) while scenes of adventure and mayhem are being shown on screen. One can point to a few distinguished exceptions to this tendency for war music to be bombastic and unimaginative: for example, Serge Prokofiev’s splendid soundtrack for *Alexander Nevsky* and Elmer Bernstein’s for *The Magnificent Seven* (itself distantly related, we may surmise, to Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*).⁵ In more ironic mode, Francis Ford Coppola’s use of Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* to accompany the horrendous/exhilarating helicopter gunship assault on a peasant village in *Apocalypse Now!* was impactful and disturbing, successful on several levels at once. More commonly, however, music in war movies is designed as an affect-inducing technique to keep audiences emotionally hooked, in suspense, and positively excited, stoking their desires for one particular side to win and for their favourite character(s) not to get killed. Almost every modern movie, whatever its story and genre, has a soundtrack – and the soundtracks for war movies, or for battle scenes within movies of any kind (e.g. about super-heroes or car chases in crime movies), tend to be among the most loud, insistent, and often cliché.

In antiquity, doubtless the most famous instance of music deployed for warlike purposes is provided by the Biblical narrative at Joshua 6:1–27, as the Israelite priests blow their rams-horn trumpets while they parade seven times round

the walls of Canaanite Jericho. Then (6:20) ‘the people [of Israel] shouted and the trumpets were blown . . . and the walls fell down flat’ (or, as the American ‘spiritual’ song expresses it, ‘Joshua fit the battle of Jericho / and the walls came tumbling down’). Was it the trumpets or the shout that brought about this unique victory? Clearly it was the Lord who really did it; but the eerie sound of the rams’ horns seems to have been understood as a crucial element in the process.⁶

On a different wavelength completely, we find musical works such as Benjamin Britten’s sombre, impassioned *War Requiem*, or Bob Dylan’s sarcastically lyrical ‘With God on Their Side’ and Country Joe MacDonald & the Fish’s ‘I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag’ – anti-war songs, whose simple acoustic guitars and unglamorous vocals focus attention on verbal critique rather than affective melodic or rhythmic stimulation. Or again, at the opposite extreme, in real-life military (rather than concert) contexts, after battle is over, we have ‘Taps’ played on the bugle or ‘Amazing Grace’ on the bagpipes, slow, simple melodies played at ceremonies to commemorate with the greatest possible solemnity and dignity those who have died in combat.

So ‘the music of war’ can sound very different and can operate in very different ways. What do we find by way of ‘war music’ in Greek tragedy overall, and in particular how does music contribute to the dramatic impact and meaning of Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*?

Music (and war) in Greek tragedy

In the contest scene of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Aeschylus’ tragedies in general are characterized as being ‘full of’ warlike elements. His opponent ‘Euripides’ disapprovingly refers (928–30) to ‘moats, and griffin-eagles embossed on shields, and horse-craggy utterances that are not easy to understand,’ while ‘Aeschylus’ in response proudly claims (1016–18) ‘[I made our citizens into] men who breathe spear, lances, white-crested plumes and helmets, greaves, and seven-ply leather [i.e. shields]!’ And then, when Euripides and Dionysus ask him how he achieved this, he boasts (1021–2), ‘by composing a drama stuffed full of Ares (*Areōs meston*)’ – ‘Which drama?’ – ‘*Seven against Thebes*!’

Both Euripides and Dionysus here seem to accept this characterization of Aeschylus’ plays, and of the *Seven* in particular, though Euripides of course emphasizes that Aeschylus’ era was one in which, even if the Athenians defeated the Persians at Marathon (490 BCE) and at Salamis (480 BCE), that is more than 70 years before the production of *Frogs*,⁷ they also were much cruder and more simple-minded in their theatrical tastes than his own sophisticated audiences. Since then, Euripides claims, he himself has made tragedy hipper and more accessible to all, ‘more democratic’ (951): so nowadays all kinds of characters can speak on stage, young women, old women, slaves . . . (948–50); things are not so hi-falutin’ and (implicitly) not so militaristic.

The *Frogs* is a comedy, of course; and it was written to be performed late in the fifth century (405 BCE), at a time when, on the one hand, the glories of Marathon and Athens’ rise to supremacy among the Greek city-states were distant memories

and, on the other, the plays of Aeschylus were increasingly felt to be rather old hat, as compared with the latest inventions of Sophocles, Euripides, Agathon, and their rivals. Aeschylus' music, in particular, like that of his famous contemporary Phrynichus, was by now quite out of style. Even though the actual melodies are not preserved in our medieval manuscripts for us to assess, any modern reader of the *Frogs* can appreciate the rhythmic contrasts reproduced in the hilarious strings of clunky Aeschylean lyrics (dactylic runs followed by the ponderous thrumming of (probably) a kithara: *to phlat o thrat to phlat o thrat . . .*), versus the melismatic slitherings of Euripidean monody and choral song, 'whirrrrrrrrling and twirrrrrrling (*eieieielissete . . .*) amidst the dolphins, etc.' (*Frogs* 1264–97, 1309–63; cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 108–11, Eur. *Electra* 435–7). Although so much is lost to us at this distance, especially in the absence of the actual melodies and choreography, we can recognize a familiar scenario here: old is challenged and succeeded by new – Elvis succeeding Sinatra; the Beatles succeeding Elvis; Michael Jackson and Prince succeeding the Beatles . . . and so on and so on.⁸

Music in most cultures thrives on innovation, even while traditional forms and melodies persist. The Athenian theatre was a hotbed of innovation, both in the dithyrambs that were performed there every year – mostly composed by non-Athenians and with non-Athenian pipe-players driving the melody – and also in the tragedies and comedies, for which most of the playwrights and actors (at least in the first half of the century), as well as all the chorus members, were Athenian citizens. More than a third, and often as many as half, of the lines of verse composed for our surviving tragedies were originally sung, to the accompaniment of the double-reed-pipes (*auloi*); and this is true of the *Seven against Thebes*. In later fifth-century tragedies, actors were often given quite extensive singing roles, but Aeschylus' use of actors' song is more limited.⁹ In our play, there are, alas, large-scale textual uncertainties as to whether Antigone and Ismene, the two daughters of Oedipus, actually appear on stage and speak and sing, or whether our manuscripts contain interpolations that have added these roles to Aeschylus' original script;¹⁰ but I follow the majority of scholars in believing that originally there were no actors' lyrics in Aeschylus' play and only the chorus had a musical role.

And it is quite a role. Obviously we don't have the actual melodies, though we do have some idea of roughly what they might have sounded like.¹¹ As for the choreography, we know even less¹² – though, curiously, *Seven* is one of very few tragedies about which we are given specific choreographic testimony (reliable or not) from an ancient source. In Athenaeus (a second-century CE author of enormous range but little historical sense) mention is made (22a1–4) of a statement by Aristocles (a second-century BCE historian) that 'Aeschylus' dancer Telestes was so skilful (*houtōs technitēs*) that in the dancing of *Seven against Thebes* he made the actions vivid and clear through the dance (*phanera poiēsai ta pragmata dia orchēseōs*).'¹³ Unfortunately we have no idea whether this Telestes was a choreographic assistant/designer for Aeschylus' original production – with *ho Aischulou orchēstēs* ('Aeschylus' dancer') meaning really his *orchēstodidaskalos* ('dance-teacher'), a term employed by Athenaeus just a few lines earlier in reference to 'Telesis or Telestēs', who is said himself to have 'invented many dance-steps

(*schēmata*) – or whether he was a much later performer who himself enacted and danced old plays, including those of Aeschylus.¹³ But it is intriguing to be told that the choreography of this particular play could be so vivid and ‘realistic’ that the offstage action was thereby made ‘plain’ (*phanera*) to the audience.

For the most part, however, in our speculations about ancient choreography we have to rely solely on our analysis of the lyric meters in which the different songs are composed, along with the occasional self-referential indications within the verbal text – and, alas, our medieval manuscripts of the surviving plays contain almost no stage directions and no comments about the melodies either. We are not even sure about the actual performance space at this date in the Theatre of Dionysus: but probably it comprised just an *orchēstra*, with no stage building, that is the same, flat, broad performance space for actors and chorus throughout.¹⁴ From the text of our play itself, we may surmise that for this production statues of various (Theban) divinities were situated around the orchestra; the chorus members were costumed as young Theban women; and they probably made their first entrance one by one or in small groups (*sporadēn*) rather than in a single body, as was more usual.¹⁵

So: how did Aeschylus deploy his musical resources so as to define and enhance the meaning and impact of this play ‘stuffed full of Ares’? What does the music of his play contribute to its treatment of war? Aeschylus’ compositional choices provide us with an intriguing insight into the role of tragedy in the Athenian *polis* and into the ways in which ‘playing’ and impersonating fictional characters of the past and giving (some of) them a musical ‘voice’ could expand the range of empathetic possibilities available to a watching and listening audience. In what follows I will suggest that the musicality of Aeschylus’ chorus provides a peculiarly powerful mechanism for engaging and affecting the audience and moving them into a series of unexpected and exciting – unstable and constantly shifting – subject positions in relation to the unfolding action, a process that depends on music’s unique capacity (as Aristotle in particular notes) for altering and enhancing listeners’ moods and mental states. Music enables the tragic action to be felt and taken in differently – to be experienced viscerally, through the senses and the body as well as verbally and imagistically – and the audience’s taking in of the chorus’ expressive voice and movements constitutes a vital ingredient in the overall dramatic effect. Whether this effect is to be regarded as ‘aesthetic’ or ‘cognitive’ or even ‘religious’ – or perhaps all three at once – will be considered in the final section of this chapter.

Aeschylus *could* of course have composed military, warlike music if that had suited his plans for the play. Such music seems always to have existed in human societies, as we have seen – even while one might estimate that ‘warlike’ music is outnumbered by ‘peaceful’ (gentle, romantic, cheerful, etc.) music by a factor of about 10:1 or even 50:1 (and plenty of music seems to fall into a category that is neither one nor the other, i.e. affectively fairly neutral).¹⁶

In ancient Greece, the use of music in and around warfare was fairly extensive. Spartan troops are said to have advanced into battle to the accompaniment of *aulos* music, and Cretan, Lydian, and other armies are reported as marching to music.¹⁷ Greek armies regularly sang celebratory paeans to Apollo before or after a battle.¹⁸ Signals could be blown on a *salpinx* (trumpet) during the course of

battle. The rowers in Greek warships (triremes) were kept in time and energized by the playing of a piper (*aulētēs*) and perhaps of a drummer as well. Young men danced the *pyrrhikhē* and other vigorous ‘shield dances’, solo or in formation, to *aulos*-accompaniment, in a combination of entertainment and balance and stamina training.¹⁹ More fancifully, Plato in the *Laws* has his Athenian Visitor assert not only that there are certain types of choral songs and dances that are warlike and build courage, physical fitness, and military discipline, while other types, composed in different melodic modes and rhythms, are more conducive to peaceful activities and mentalities (7.813c–815c, and cf. 7.794c–802e, 8.834d–835b), but also that women as well as men should practice both kinds – a very unorthodox proposal in the ancient Greek context, in which women were not normally expected to participate actively in warfare. (I shall return to discuss this passage further in what follows).

In Greek tragedy, we find several examples of celebratory and hortatory songs being sung by choruses after or before a crucial battle, in modes that presumably reflect real-life Greek practice. Thus in the *parodos* of Sophocles’ *Antigone* the chorus rejoice and thank the gods for saving them from the Argive assault:

Sun’s own radiance, fairest light ever shone
on the seven gates of Thebes,
then did you shine, O golden day’s
eye, coming over Dirce’s stream,
on the man who had come from Argos with all his armor
running now in headlong fear as you shook his bridle free. . . .
. . . Great-named Victory comes to us
answering Thebe’s warrior joy.
Let us forget the wars just done
and visit the shrines of the gods,
all, with the night-long dance which Bacchus will lead,
he who shakes Thebe’s acres.

(Soph. *Ant.* 100–8, 147–53; tr. E. Wyckoff)

In a similarly up-beat manner, the old men of Colonus (Athens) appeal to their gods in anticipation of Theseus’ imminent battle against Creon and his Theban troops:

Oh, to be where the enemies wheel about,
to hear the shout and brazen sound of war!
Maybe on Apollo’s sacred shore
or by that torchlit Eleusinian plain . . .
. . . For to these regions the warrior-king Theseus
will press the fighting on – as he brings
help to the two maiden sisters,
self-sufficient in his battle-strength!
. . . These are the riders of Athens, conquered never;
they honor her whose glory all men know,
and honor Poseidon too . . .
the one who holds the earth firm.

(Soph. *OC* 1044–5, 1052–7, 1068–71; tr. R. Fitzgerald, adapted)

Both of these songs are performed by male choruses, referring to recent or imminent victories over threatening foes in contexts rather close to that of *Seven against Thebes*, a military action against invaders from another Greek *polis*. In both cases the songs express – and elicit – patriotic fervor, mentioning divinely assisted resistance and the chorus’ joy at victory, achieved or anticipated.

And in Aeschylus’ own *Persians*, produced five years before his Theban trilogy of which *Seven* alone survives, a Persian messenger recounts the inspiring paean that the Greeks sang as they prepared for battle at Salamis – and the demoralizing effect of these sounds on their Persian adversaries:

... A song-like, happy tumult
sounded from the Greeks, and island rocks returned
the high-pitched echo. Fear fell among us,
deceived in hope; for they – and not as if to flee –
chanted a solemn paean, and to battle
rushed with fervent boldness: trumpets flared
setting every Greek aflame.

(Aesch. *Persians* 387–95, tr. Benardete)

So a ‘play full of Ares’ might seem to offer plenty of opportunity for music of similarly militaristic and inspiring mood. But the music of *Seven against Thebes* is nothing like any of the examples I’ve just cited.²⁰ Of course a female chorus such as that of *Seven* would not be expected to sing in quite the same manner as the male choruses of the above-mentioned plays; and indeed Aeschylus makes the most of the feminine aspects of musical performance provided by his choice of chorus for this play, as we will see.²¹ Women in ancient Greece apparently had a much wider variety of musical idioms and techniques available to them than men did. Their range of vocalizings was greater (including wails, ululations, moans, etc., as well as more conventionally melodic and verbal singing), and they were expected to use physical percussive devices (hands and feet: clapping, stomping, beating, and thumping) more extensively than men. Women also had more extensive options for instrumental accompaniment – that is, in addition to the *auloi* (double pipes) and standard stringed instruments (lyre and *kithara* – though they rarely played the full-scale concert *kithara*), women played various kinds of multi-stringed instruments that were apparently not available to citizen men²² and various kinds of percussion instruments too: frame-drums (*tympana*), rattles of various kinds (*seistra*), castanets and clappers (*krembala*, *krotala*), even occasionally cymbals and gongs.²³ Altogether, these added up to a much greater and more versatile repertoire of ‘feminine’ sonorities than was available to free citizen men outside of the Theatre.²⁴

The degree of musical participation by women in various social and religious activities seems also to have been considerably greater than the rather narrow range of lyre- and kithara-based music making that is recommended for Athenian boys and men in our – generally rather conservative – surviving sources, including critics like Plato and Aristotle. In most regions and city-states of Greece,

including (to a lesser degree) Athens, women (especially unmarried women) sang and danced in choruses not only for Artemis, Hera, and Aphrodite but also for Dionysus and Cybele/Rhea (= the Great Mother) as well as Demeter-Persephone (= the Two Goddesses).²⁵ Women sang at work as they wove cloth, ground grain and baked bread, washed clothes, and so on;²⁶ they sang lullabies to their babies; and in particular they sang laments at funerals or after military defeats.²⁷ Athens was unusual (as Plutarch notes) in banning such large-scale and demonstrative expressions of grief in public.²⁸ So the Athenian dramatists could enjoy to the full the opportunities provided by the Theatre to present men in drag (i.e. those ubiquitous 'female choruses' of tragedy; also of course satyrs in the satyr-dramas) vocalizing, gesturing, and dancing in ways that Athenian men would never normally do and conducting scenes of ritual lamentation that were forbidden anywhere else in Attica yet widely practiced all over the rest of Greece and beyond.

Likewise, foreign men in Greek tragedy might lament musically and extravagantly,²⁹ as they are represented doing in Aeschylus' *Persians* – a play adapted, we are told, from an earlier tragedy by Aeschylus' famous rival Phrynichus, in which the chorus were not male Persian Elders (as in Aeschylus) but Phoenician slave women.³⁰ The ending of Aeschylus' *Persians* is full of antiphonal lament and musical cries of grief and despair, as well as distinctive body movements and choreography (tearing, beating, 'rowing' with the hands) as the King of Persia and his councillors lament the catastrophic defeats and losses at Salamis, Plataea, and afterwards.³¹

[Chorus] Loudly shall I send, to greet your return,
an evil-omened shout, an evil-practiced cry:

a weeping wail I shall sing,
the wail of a Mariandynian mourner.

[Xerxes] Send a wail of evil sound
lamenting and grievous . . .

[Xerxes] Sweep, sweep, sweep with the oar, and groan for my sake.

[Chorus] Ah, ah! Pain, pain!

[Xerxes] Cry out antiphonal to me.

[Chorus] My duty is here, O master, lord.

[Xerxes] Lift up your voice in lamenting now.

[Xerxes and Chorus together] O woe, woe, woe upon woe.

[Chorus] Black with bruises again the blows are mixed,
Oh, with the groans.

[Xerxes] Beat your breast too and cry Mysian laments. . . .

[Chorus] With clenched hand, grimly mourning.

[Xerxes] Shriek a piercing cry.

[Chorus] And so I shall . . .

(Aesch. *Persians* 935–42, 1046–59, tr. Benardete)

The Theatre was thus a place to which Athenians (and visitors to Attica as well) could go to *hear* as well as see (and for scores of them each year, even perform for themselves) scenes and sounds that they couldn't normally experience in everyday

life. (The ancient Greeks had no recording devices: all music was played and heard live, face to face.) Enhanced through the vicarious techniques of *mimēsis* (i.e. ‘performing, playing’), a massed audience could experience, live – acoustically and visually as well as linguistically and cerebrally – the adventures and sufferings of people like – or quite unlike – themselves, facing some of life’s most extreme conditions and terrifying threats (what Aristotle classifies as ‘representation[s] of serious action . . . that produce pity and fear and <other> such emotions,’ *Poet.* 6. 1449b24–8, etc.).³² Watching *Seven against Thebes*, audience members are brought to identify and empathize – share the point of view, temporarily adopt the subject position – alternately, of *both* an angry, tormented young man as he does his best to lead his city to safety and victory against an invading army even while the ghosts of his family’s past mistakes and misdeeds haunt him at every step *and* of the community within which this young man lives, including the regular soldiers (i.e. the Scout/Messenger) and, above all, the women – daughters, sisters, mothers, and slaves – who constitute half the population of the city.³³ Eteocles’ character is portrayed, as is conventional in Greek tragedy for a male hero, through measured speech (in iambic trimeter verse), while the chorus’ point of view, feelings, and identity are expressed largely through song and dance (in various lyric meters). The audience shares both perspectives and to some degree is thus brought to engage emotionally and even corporeally, as well as intellectually and critically, with their respective actions and reactions. The music is obviously central to this engagement – it *moves* the audience, acoustically, corporeally, viscerally, in ways that the iambic dialogue and rhesis cannot³⁴ – just as, for example, the music of opera, or of Sufi *qawwali* performance, or of Pentecostal gospel services transcends the capabilities of the spoken word in uplifting and transforming the sensibilities of those attending.

Aristotle and other ancient musicologists remark that among the most affective kinds of music (i.e. ‘enthusiastic’ melodies in Lydian or Phrygian *harmonia* played on the *auloi*) are the kind used in the theatre. The term ‘enthusiastic’ (*enthousias-tikos*, derived from the adjective *entheos* = lit. ‘filled-with-god’ = ‘inspired, possessed’) is used interchangeably by Aristotle in the *Politics* with other terms such as ‘orgiastic’, ‘sacred’ (*hieros*), and ‘Bacchic’. At one point (*Pol.* 8.5.1340a9–10) he remarks that, even outside the theatre, the highly affective and mood-altering *aulos* tunes (*melē*) of Olympus ‘make souls inspired’ (*poiei tas psuchas enthousiastikas*), and he continues: ‘inspiration/possession (*enthousiasmos*) is a <temporary> reaction (*pathos*) of the soul’s *ēthos*,’ following this with the further suggestion (1340a22) that ‘we are altered (in) our soul as we listen to such tunes (*metaballomen tēn psuchēn akroōmenoi toioutōn*).’

The beauty and affective power of the human singing voice and of the musical structures (melodic tones, rhythms, phrasings) that create their own formal patterns of anticipation and satisfaction, tension and release, buildup and resolution (cadences), crescendo and diminuendo, accelerando and ritardando, modifications of texture and sonority, and so forth – that is, all that is entailed in the standard Greek musical terms *melos* (melody), *harmonia* (melodic mode, or tuning, or musical ‘idiom’), *phōnē* (voice, texture, timbre), and *rhuthmos* (rhythm,

beat, meter, ‘flow’)³⁵ – was intimately connected in the Theatre of Dionysus with the instrument that was always employed to accompany those singing voices: the double reed pipes (*auloi*). This extremely versatile instrument, widely used (as we have seen) in many different social contexts by the Greeks and Romans (= *tibia*), was renowned for its tonal range and its expressivity: it produced a warm (or even ‘hot’), breathy sound that, in the hands of a virtuoso – and the Theatre employed only virtuosos – could be strident or soft, shrill or booming, fierce or tender and mellow, and it could modulate effectively and uninterruptedly from one musical tuning or idiom to another (in ways that a *kithara*, for example, with its fixed, pre-tuned strings, could not). We might think of a combination of bagpipes, clarinet (Mediterranean or Klezmer-style), and saxophone.³⁶ Ancient sources all agree that the *auloi* could stir the emotions and alter the mood of audiences in ways that no other instrument could match. So the contrast between an unaccompanied, ‘bare’ (male) speaking voice such as that of Eteocles in our play and a group of singing ‘women’ (albeit played by men) accompanied by the pipes, would be extreme – and the process of the audience’s identification with each would thus be, I suggest, deliciously different: Eteocles sounds like ‘us’ (the seated, attentive, predominantly male Athenian audience members), and he talks and argues in somewhat ‘normal’ language and tones, while the chorus are excitingly ‘other’ and different from us, even as their affective musicality engages us, alters our mood and feelings, and draws us into identifying with their collective song and dance – both because of the traditional function of a Greek chorus as representing its whole community³⁷ and because of the sheer attractiveness and affective quality of the musical sounds themselves (to say nothing of the visual and kinesthetic impact as well, discussed earlier). Music moves people, immediately and strongly, in ways that no other of the fine arts – or literature – can begin to match.³⁸

In planning the musical components of this play, Aeschylus’ choice was to provide, first, a soundscape that would suggest a whole city under siege with its population in near or actual panic; and second, a ‘voice’ suggestive of fate/the family curse – of an Erinys.³⁹ Both these musical modes, or ‘voices’, contrast with the solo male voice – militaristic, fiercely committed yet resolutely controlled and ‘monotonous’ (i.e. unmelodious, rhythmically regular) – of the young Theban general, Eteocles, son of Oedipus. Thus in the first half of the play, the choral voice explores the violent threats and acts of degradation faced by a captured city and brings these to auditory/musical life. In the later portion, the musical focus shifts more to the Erinys and the history of this family – and then finally, to the lament for the two dead brothers.

So let us begin by looking at the dynamics of the first half of the play and at the ways in which the chorus expresses musically the fear, anticipation, and desperate religiosity experienced by a vulnerable population under attack.⁴⁰

Such scenes were not entirely new to Greek literature. The grim realities of female suffering, loss, and enslavement in war were already a striking, though subordinate, element in Homer’s *Iliad*. That poem actually concludes with women’s lamentation over Hector at his funeral (Book 24), with Hecuba, Andromache, and Helen all in turn uttering their respects and their feelings of loss while the

assembled women of Troy respond in antiphonal lament.⁴¹ In an even more poignant, though much shorter, scene in Book 19, Achilles' captive concubine Briseis utters a speech of lament over Patroclus' dead body, and the narrator adds a brief and sickening, yet almost casual, comment of his own:⁴²

And now, in the likeness of golden Aphrodite, Briseis
when she saw Patroklos lying torn with sharp bronze, folding
him in her arms cried shrilly above him and with her hands tore
at her breasts and her soft throat and her beautiful forehead.
The woman like the immortals mourning for him spoke to him:
'Patroklos, far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows,
I left you here alive when I went away from the shelter,
but now I come back, lord of the people, to find you have fallen.
So evil in my life takes over from evil forever . . .
. . . Therefore I weep your death without ceasing. You were kind always.'
So she spoke, lamenting, and the women sorrowed around her
grieving openly for Patroklos, but for her own sorrows each.

(Homer *Iliad* 19. 282–90, 300–3)

This is what war does, and what war has always meant over the millennia, particularly when conducted by traditional patriarchal societies in which, for the most part, men select, capture, or buy women to be their wives or concubines or slave labourers. (Briseis herself, as she explains, came to be Achilles' concubine when he sacked her city, killed her husband and three brothers, and made her his slave – and that is how she came to make friends with 'kind' Patroclus (*Iliad* 19. 291–301)). In such on-going socio-political circumstances, girls and women have to plan their lives accordingly, in full awareness of the possible vicissitudes in their family fortunes and their city's successes and failures in war. War is thus often a significant component of the 'traffic in women.'⁴³ (For boys and men, prospects are measured instead in terms of the likelihood of wounding or death in face-to-face combat on the battlefield, which in our play is no less prominent an issue.) Regardless of religious affiliation or geopolitical context – Greek polytheism, Biblical Judaism, Medieval and Early Modern Christianity or Islam – the picture was not much different, it seems, and the habit, or system, of brutality and rape inflicted on female captives of war apparently persists all over the world today.

Euripides is the playwright who is most widely recognized for his exploration of this theme, above all in his *Trojan Women* (415 BCE) – itself a play full of music and female lament.⁴⁴ But Aeschylus, with the uncannily expressive and musical voice of the captive concubine Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, the asylum-seeking Egyptian refugees in *Suppliant Maidens*, and the terrified Theban maidens in our play, offers in some ways even more disturbing imaginings and re-creations of the mood of female horror and helplessness in the face of male violence and the impact of war – even when that war may appear to be 'just' and divinely sanctioned.⁴⁵ In all three of these Aeschylean plays music does much of the vital dramatic work of representing female victimhood and anguish. Cassandra's wild vocalizing and dochmiac-framed outbursts of horror and dismay in *Ag.* are uniquely pathetic and

suspenseful, and the *Suppliant Maidens* overall is the most musical of all surviving Greek tragedies, dominated as it is throughout by the voice and movements of the singing chorus. Such musically extravagant characters and choruses manage to be at the same time, I suggest, both wildly alien, ‘exotic’, and ‘different’ and yet also utterly engaging and irresistible in their appeal to our empathetic feelings – in much the same way that Purcell’s *Dido*, Bizet’s *Carmen*, or even performers such as Michael Jackson and Prince can appeal to audiences of radically different social backgrounds and ethical outlooks.

There is an additional twist to this phenomenon of tragic music, in relation to Athenian plays about the travails of ancient Thebes. For, even while it has been well noted by Froma Zeitlin and others that ‘Thebes’ in Greek tragedy often is presented as the city where everything goes wrong, that is an ‘anti-Athens’, and a model of tragic dysfunction,⁴⁶ it is also indisputable that classical Thebes, of all the cities in Greece, had the most distinguished reputation for its music – even more distinguished, one might say, than the cities of Lesbos, Ionian Miletus, or Archaic Sparta. By contrast, Athens over the years was, in terms of its indigenous achievements, rather a musical nonentity: most of the distinguished musicians who performed in Athens during the sixth century had been foreign visitors, and that process continued into the fifth century with the dithyrambic competitions at the City Dionysia and other musical events at the Panathenaia. And while the dramas staged in the Theatre of course provided opportunities for Athenian playwrights and choruses to imitate the music of the rest of the world, the accompanying auletes were largely drawn from outside Athens, especially Thebes.⁴⁷ Thebes’ musical heritage – from mythological figures such as Cadmus and Harmonia, Amphion, Linus, and Dionysus himself⁴⁸ to the city’s dominant position in *aulos* production and competitive *aulos*-playing throughout the fifth century that we find celebrated by Pindar (himself a highly-trained *aulos*-player and even *aulos*-teacher, we are told) and multiple inscriptions and vase-paintings – all together amount to a reputation and a reality of musical pre-eminence that Athenians might find hard to stomach.⁴⁹ The Theatre of Dionysus at Athens provided a venue where the best Theban auletes (and dithyramb composers) could come to stir the Athenian audience’s emotions and explore the latest and most adventurous musical innovations.⁵⁰ We do not know who played the *auloi* for Aeschylus’ tragedies; but the production budget and design scheme would certainly have paid serious attention to that aspect of the performance.

Reading – and hearing – the music of *Seven against Thebes*⁵¹

The opening (lines 78–107) of the first choral song (*parodos*) were probably delivered in short, abrupt spurts (what Greek scholiasts would term *sporadēn*), with individual chorus members entering one or two at a time, crying out their separate phrases of alarm and dismay. The metrical structure (esp. the lack of strophic responson) and the character of these detached, non-continuous utterances all seem to suggest this:⁵² that is, this is not (yet) a coordinated choral *group* expressing its collective opinion but rather a swirling, disjointed succession of individuals

who are rushing to this spot from different parts of the city, drawn by what they hear going on all around them.⁵³

The meter is mainly dochmiac, a distinctive rhythm that is widely used in Greek tragedy – but virtually nowhere else⁵⁴ – to express/convey anxiety, terror, grief, and disturbance of all kinds.⁵⁵ It so happens that this is also the metre in which one of our earliest and most substantial (though still very small and damaged) surviving scraps of annotated music from Greek tragedy is composed, the celebrated Vienna papyrus of Euripides' *Orestes*.⁵⁶ Aeschylus' music, we know, was not so melodically free-flowing and ornamented as Euripides' – the parodies in Aristophanes' *Frogs* make this resoundingly clear – but the basic melodic line as well as the rhythmic pulse of our extended *Seven* passage might well have been similar to that of the *Orestes* fragment.

The chorus of young Theban women describe their own terrified and somewhat incoherent cries with self-referential commentary: 'I am shouting' (78 *threomai*),⁵⁷ and these merge with the vivid description of the fearful sounds and sights of the Argive army as it advances, 'rushing and roaring like a mountain water-fall' (80 *rhei*, 85–6 *bremei* . . . *dikan hudatos orotupou*), towards the walls of the city. (The merging is even reflected in the resonance of *threomai*, *rhei*, and *bremei*.)⁵⁸ The enemy troops clatter and thump and crash, producing what amounts to a virtual 'cry for help' (89 *boān*) directed into the chorus' ear from the very earth-floor (*pedia*) of Thebes as it is struck by the hooves and weapons of the enemy: 'the hoof-struck ground sends a cry to my ear' (84 *pedia hoploktup' ōti khrimptei boān*; cf. 89 *boā*).

Interspersed with these descriptive phrases are unmetrical⁵⁹ cries or shrieks: 78 (?) *iō*, *iō*, 87 *iō*, *iō*, 97 *iō*; etc. Through these auditory cues, as well as a direct address at 100, the audience⁶⁰ are directly drawn into sharing the chorus' experience: 'Do you hear, or don't you hear, the din/crash of shields?' (100 is an unresolved iambic trimeter, and thus relatively unmusical, it seems, though two other trimeters within this passage [103, 106] are more agitated-sounding, with resolutions. It is impossible to determine whether these three trimeters were sung, like the surrounding dochmiacs, or delivered in regular speaking tones.)

The merging of sounds and sights becomes even more complete in the (often-cited) synaesthetic phrase: 103 'I can see the thumping – it's the clatter of many spears!' (*ktupon dedorka* . . . *patagos oukh henos doros*).⁶¹ For the chorus, hearing the sounds makes it possible to picture the source before their very eyes. And in the audience's case, we *can* indeed see the chorus as they enact the 'thumping, clattering, crying' of horses, harnesses, chariots, shields, and spears, as well as the marching feet of soldiers.⁶² The chorus' own stamping feet (as they dance), their hand-percussion,⁶³ and the shrieking/howling/skirling of the *auloi* all add further musical layers enhancing the vocal melody. Reminiscent of the 'rushing river' of Pindar's song that Horace mentions (*Odes* 4.2) or the 'stream of words' that flows from a Homeric orator's or poet's mouth, but now less articulate and less sweet on the ear, the roaring mountain torrent (85–86) and 'crashing/breaking wave, stirred up by the winds of Ares' that the chorus describes (112–15 *kuma* . . . *kakhlazei*) is

an assault on the ear rather than a charm for it. The audience is swept along and aurally bombarded by the chorus' multiple short syllables (resolved dochmiacs and iambics) and extensive onomatopoeia, an assault that is in its own way rhythmically exciting and engaging – and one must assume that it was melodically appealing and suspenseful as well.⁶⁴

By this point in the play, war – or at least the materiality of war, its sensory, experiential dimension – paradoxically has become a female matter. It is mainly through the voices of the female chorus members – and perhaps the gendered musical instruments as well – that war obtains representation on stage (whereas at other moments in the play it will be *via* the spoken iambic reports of the Scout/Messenger, describing the Argive army's manoeuvres and the shields of their seven champions). Thus intermittently the chorus as an orderly – or disorderly – formation (which through emotion and music tries to push against its traditional *taxis*) aspires to become/replicate an army (*stratos*, whose etymological sense, 'spread out', from the Greek verb *stornumi*, in turn recalls, in a way, the visual effect of the choral presence on stage). In this sense one could say that the female chorus begins here to 'embody' the Argive army, so that the *agōn* between the chorus and Eteocles can be read as a surrogate of the final conflict between Eteocles and Polynices; and meanwhile Eteocles' attempt to silence the chorus becomes an attempt to reclaim war for the male sphere. Overall, war has been transformed in these scenes and songs into the tumult of affects mobilized on stage.⁶⁵

For this chorus, at this moment, the most urgent goal is to approach the images of the gods as suppliants, to adorn them with gifts, and to beg them for help (92–9, 101–2, etc.). They address the gods and goddesses collectively and then each one in turn: Ares, Zeus, Pallas Athena, Cypris/Aphrodite, Lycian Apollo, Hera, Artemis . . . (presumably, their statues are placed around the orchestra).⁶⁶

87 *Iō, Iō*, gods and goddesses, ward off this evil that is surging towards us . . . !'

92–9 'So who will protect us, who of the gods and goddesses will keep them away?

May I, myself, then fall in supplication at the images of the divinities?

Iō, blessed ones, well enthroned here, this is the moment <for me> to clasp your images. Why do we delay, as we moan out loud?

In what follows, their song becomes more cohesive and unified, with strophic response and symmetrically ordered structures of invocation, even while it continues to be punctuated by shrill melodic and rhythmic refrains of *E E E E*, *pheu*, or *Iō, Iō*, and to employ insistent repetitions of words and phrases (134 *epilusin . . . epilusin . . .*, 167 *teleioi teleiai te*, 171 *kluete . . . kluete*, 177–8 *melesthe . . . melomenoi*). It reaches its rhetorical climax in the pair of stanzas at 166–81 (strophe ~ antistrophe C), as they throw themselves at the mercy of the 'all-protecting' (166 *panalkeis*), 'completely-guaranteed-successful city-defenders' (166–7 *teleioi teleiai te . . . purgophylakes*), 'liberators' (175 *lutērioi*), 'lovers-of-their-city' (176 *philopoleis*), 'caring for us' (178 *melomenoi*). And the maidens conclude (174–81) with a ritually correct process

of ‘reminding’ those gods and goddesses (181 ‘be mindful, please . . . !’ *mnēstores este moi*) of the ‘due deeds of devotion’ (*philothutōn . . . orgiōn*) that the city has performed for them in the past.

The chorus has thus, we might say, up to this point done a ‘beautiful’ job of musically and verbally channelling its terror into effective ritual action: their actions and words, though in places only semi-articulate, are rhythmically coordinated and insistently directed so as to ensure divine attention, favor, and assistance (177–8 *meleste, melomenoi . . . orgiōn mnēstores este moi*).⁶⁷ The second-person plural imperatives and interrogatives implicitly draw together the inhabitants of Thebes (‘do you hear . . . ?’), the gods and goddesses of the city (179 *arēxate* ‘help us!’), and the theatre audience itself as collective addressees of the chorus’s appeals. Thus we are all brought to share the young women’s sense of intense anxiety, of dependence on others for their salvation, and of their personal identification with the fate of the whole city. What happens to Thebes will happen directly to them – and this is true also for their divinities, inasmuch as looting and damage to shrines and radical changes to ritual practice often result from the capture of a city (cf. 218, 321–5, 421–9, 531, etc.); and the audience is brought to feel that it is almost happening to themselves as well, as the whole theatre space has by now become ‘Thebes’. This is not just a battle for the throne or for the settling of scores between two cursed brothers: regime change will entail the incursion of a whole ‘different-voiced army’ (170 *heterophōnōi stratōi*)⁶⁸ into this sacred space and their domination of the whole community. The integrity of Thebes is in jeopardy, and the empathizing audience has been brought by the chorus’ lyrics to feel this threat as affecting them as well.

Eteocles enters. Strikingly (and notoriously, among modern critics), he is disgusted with the chorus’s behaviour and their shrill singing (and presumably also their wild movements, i.e. dancing that has been choreographed so as to appear semi-chaotic, almost out of control, yet still intently focused and collaborative). ‘You, unbearable creatures (181 *thremmata ouk anascheta*) . . . Is this the best way to defend a city, . . . by howling and shrieking and prostrating yourselves before the images of the gods . . . ?’ (181–6). The scene that follows provides a clear example of that typically Greek way of thinking about causation and responsibility that we refer to as ‘double determination’, as the same event is seen as being caused by both human and divine agencies working in parallel or in tandem. In this scenario, Eteocles as ‘governor, steersman’ of the city (62 *oiakostrophos*, cf. 3 *oiaka nōmōn*, and Aesch. *Supp.* 770 *kybernētēs*) and as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, in contrast to the prayerful chorus focuses above all on the human resources at his disposal, that is his massed troops and – in due course – his secret weapons, the seven champions that he selects to defend the Seven Gates.

This is man’s work – both in the sense of male work and of its being a set of rational, human responsibilities rather than a matter of blind faith and dependence on the gods. Women (from this perspective) should not get in the way, should not distract men from their war effort. Their voices and physical presence should not be allowed to express anything other than positive assistance to the military. (Eteocles would like to hear real ‘war music’, we may say.) Eteocles thus sees

the chorus' desire to pray so fervently for divine help as at best a subordinate component of the war effort and currently as undermining it through expressions of fear and uncertainty – and eventually he persuades, or intimidates, the young women into agreeing with him, at least briefly. Though the chorus insists (226–32) that 'the strength of god is even superior (sc. to mere human 'discipline and best-practice' = 224–5 *peitharchia* . . . *eupraxia*) and that it can 'save and restore the helpless one' (227–9 *ton amēchanon orthoi* [lit. 'set up straight']) and rescue him even from 'the hanging clouds of direst trouble', Eteocles retorts (230) that 'This is *men's* work (*andrōn tad' esti*)', to perform blood sacrifices and make public prayers to the gods.⁶⁹ 'Your job, in turn (232 *son d' au*) [i.e. as women], is to be silent (*to sigān*) and remain indoors!' The chorus continue to argue, but eventually their sung dochmiacs give way (245) to spoken iambic trimeters in a line-by-line exchange (*stichomythia*) with Eteocles; and finally they agree (263), 'I am silent. I will endure along with everyone else (*xun allois*, masculine, implicitly referring to the men as well as the women of the city) what is fated.' They move away from the statues (as Eteocles instructs them to do, 265) and prepare to sing a more restrained prayer for the gods' assistance – so not actually heading back indoors and remaining mute as Eteocles had first demanded (which would mean leaving the orchestra – and taking no further part in the play!), but rather reconfiguring their role and toning down, modulating rather than silencing their mode of ritual singing and dancing – not such a radical adjustment after all from their previous activity.

This whole scene of dialogue exchange (*amoibaion*) between Eteocles and the chorus at 203–45 is a brilliant piece of theatre (or opera, or whatever we should call it). Eteocles himself is not a musical or lyrical figure at all. Even when he reaches the most extreme state of distress, towards the end of the play, he does not sing, unlike for example, Sophocles' Oedipus or Aeschylus' own Orestes in the *Libation Bearers* and Xerxes in *Persians* (or even, briefly, Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound*). He is presented instead as a resolutely prosaic/pragmatic, rationalizing young man – one who is surrounded by voices and demonic forces that 'sound' much different from him, voices that, I have suggested, thereby have the capacity to tap into the audience's emotions more immediately, more viscerally, and more evocatively than he does.

The song that the chorus performs after Eteocles departs to arrange his battle plan (287–368 = the first *stasimon*) does indeed revisit some of the same elements that we saw and heard in their opening song (*parodos*), even while they are no longer roaming so vigorously around the orchestra nor directly approaching the statues of the gods. The metre is more restrained now: mainly alternations between syncopated iambs (lekythia, etc.) and aeolics – rather similar in flavour, overall, to many of the lyrics of for example, Aesch. *Agamemnon*, composed ten years later.⁷⁰

From descriptions of the foreign threat and pious, fearful requests (once again) for the gods to protect the inhabitants of Cadmus' city and to do damage to the approaching enemy, the chorus in the second strophic pair build to some disturbing images of the fate of a captured city, especially its women:

*Pitiful*⁷¹ it [is/would be], to hurl a city so venerable as this down to Hades,
 enslaved, prey of the spear . . . , burnt to ashes . . . ,
 . . . and the women manhandled (326 *kekheirōmenas*) and led away,
Ah, Ah!

young and old alike, like horses, grabbed by the hair,
 with their clothes being ripped off them.

[It] cries loudly for help (*boāi*), the city cries as it is emptied out
 of this ruinous/ruined plunder,

a mixed babble of sounds (*meixothroou*, cf. 78 *threomai*).

Heavy are the misfortunes that I dread!

Woeful it (is/would be), that newly-grown-up, unripely plucked,
 <sc. girls> before the proper time have to leave their homes
 to tread a hateful path.

The dead man, I claim, does better (is better off) than they (do).⁷²

Many things <happen>,
 when a city is subdued.⁷³

Ah, Ah!

Many disastrous things does it go through.

(321–39)

The two corresponding moments in strophe and antistrophe at which normal words suddenly fail and inarticulate – but presumably musical – shrieks or wails intervene (327/339 *EE*, rendered here as ‘Ah! Ah!’) are the moments when the maidens contemplate the prospect of being raped by their captors. The musical register can convey more, or at least suggest more vividly and affectively, than plain words can describe or convey. Loss of one’s home city, eradication of *ta nomima* (334 = normality, local and family traditions), deprivation of status and freedom, brutal violation of one’s body by a stranger: all of these are the standard costs of losing a war, and all of these are what a conquering state routinely expects to inflict on its enemy, in ancient Greece and in many arenas of war even today. This is what the young Athenian men in Aeschylus’ chorus are given by the playwright to sing, to the accompaniment of the shrill, breathy, and mournful voice of the *auloi*,⁷⁴ as they evoke the feelings of the women in a city under attack.

Further mixed and disturbing sounds are onomatopoeically reproduced by the chorus in what follows: 345 *korkorugai* (‘tumult?’), 348 *blakhai* (‘wails’). And there follow vivid descriptions of babies being torn from their mothers’ breasts, grain and fruits being grabbed, spilt, shared out or fought over by the victors . . . (At 351 the Greek term *harpagai* is equivalent to Latin *rapina*, i.e. ‘violent seizure’). And then the chorus’s imagination returns to their own worst fantasy-nightmare:⁷⁵

Slave-girls, young, new to their suffering,
 <enduring> the bed won by the spear
 of a man enjoying his success (*andros eutuchountos*)—
 since, when the enemy is stronger <lit. ‘is on top’> (*hyperterou*),
 it is to be expected

that a night-time consummation/duty arrives (*nukteron telos molein*), added to (*epirrhothon*) their utterly-lamentable miseries.⁷⁶

(363–8)

This, then, is the soundscape, or phonosphere – and the imaginary landscape or cityscape – that surrounds Eteocles as he begins his lengthy consultation with the messenger, about the disposition of his champions at the Seven Gates of Thebes. Space does not permit a full commentary here on the ways in which the chorus punctuate his and the messenger's dialogue with their own strophically responding lyrics (375–630); we may simply note that this contrast between speaking men and singing women maintains the gender distinction that was established in the opening scenes, as well as the contrast between the rational and confident planning of Eteocles and the more emotional, religiously tinged, and musical responses of the maidens – up until the fateful moment when the Scout announces that 'the seventh one at the Seventh Gate is your own brother . . .' (631–2), and Eteocles responds with his defiant, half-crazed acceptance speech of the role of defender and fratricide (653–76).

At this point, with the long sequence of paired speeches from the messenger and Eteocles completed and all seven champions matched up in an archetypal sequence of performative speech-acts,⁷⁷ there follows another short, urgent scene in which the chorus sing back and forth in quick exchanges with the speaking Eteocles – just as they did in their opening scene with him, but now with a radically different dynamic. Now it is they who are taking the initiative in making suggestions and offering strong advice ('don't do it!'), while the king is frozen into a state of hopeless, yet grim and determined, resignation.⁷⁸

After Eteocles struts off stage towards his destiny at the Seventh Gate, the chorus sing one of the most astonishing and gripping odes in all of Greek tragedy: a masterpiece of formal symmetry (clearly evident despite the messed-up state of our manuscripts), an over-arching resumé of all the trilogy's main themes, and a chillingly insistent reminder of the inescapable presence and deadly impact of the *Erinyes* – however we choose to translate this eery word, the 'Fury' that embodies or encapsulates the curse(s), the family hatreds, the tainted bloodline that has been the focus of this whole trilogy.⁷⁹

The metrical structure of this ode (720–91), especially its first two strophic pairs, has been much analysed and admired.⁸⁰ In the first pair of stanzas, the sequence of neatly dovetailed choriambic or ionic cola,⁸¹ wrapped up with the so-called Alcaic decasyllable clausula of 726 = 733, re-poses – and conclusively answers – the deadly riddles that have haunted Oedipus' family for three generations. The stanzas interweave almost all the key themes of the trilogy: in the strophe, the Erinyes who embodies the demented father's curse (723–5); the spirit of rivalry that has divided the brothers ever since birth (726 *paidoletōr eris*); the 'all-too-true oracle of evils to come' (723 *panalēthē kakomantin*); and then, in the antistrophe, the 'Chalybian Stranger . . . divider of the property-lots, Steel (*Sidēros*, 727–33)', who will award to each of the brothers an equal share, that is as much land as he deserves = a patch of earth for his grave, 'with no share in the large territories'

(733 *tōn megalōn pediōn amoirous*). In the second strophic pair (734–49) the chorus go deeper still, now in predominantly iambo-cretic-trochaic rhythm, reaching back into the earlier phases of the story and linking these up to the imminent – by now, we sense, already occurring – ‘mutual slaughter’ of the two brothers (734 *autoktonōs autodaiktoi*). Their singing reminds us that so much past and present bloodshed and so many violations of family ties have piled up that we can no longer imagine cleansing or liberating this house from its ‘new troubles mixed with ancient-born evils’ (740–1). And at this point the chorus launches into a rehearsal of the original three-stage process of transgression and ruin (744–5), dating back to Laius’ and Jocasta’s first encounter with the oracle of Apollo.

The final, echoing word of this whole, long choral song is – of course – *Erinys* again (791): ‘And now I tremble lest she bring <everything> to completion, the bent-kneed, swift Erinys!’ (790–1 *nun de treō mē telesēi kampsipous Erinus*). With this phrase the chorus, in long-range yet tightly packed ring-composition, echo the opening of their song (720–1 ‘I shudder at the goddess who is unlike the <other> gods, and who destroys households’). That goddess has now achieved her purpose and is about to ‘finalize, complete’ everything (*telesēi*), as the messenger will confirm immediately after this choral song.⁸² Those other gods too, the gods of Thebes to whom the chorus have been praying throughout the play, have also been listening, it seems, and have fulfilled their obligations, by providing a Theban victory and protecting their city, just as the chorus requested. Religion works, prayer pays off, it appears, at least in the eyes and hearts of the faithful – the chorus’ earlier music, desperate and improper though it may have sounded to Eteocles, was effectual and was apparently heard by the gods and goddesses of Thebes.

In this long ode (the second *stasimon*), the musicality of the Theban maidens is focused not, as in the opening scenes, on summoning up the sounds and sights of battle and its chaotic consequences but on the repetitions and resonances of this family’s long history of human mistakes and divine sabotage. The sense of ‘finality’ is formally reinforced by the artful symmetries and ring composition of the whole song, in contrast to the scattered and unpredictable lyrics that we heard from them on their first arrival. The song thus conveys in its musical cadence a sense of ‘completion, finality’ (724 *telesai*, 791 *telesēi*) from the perspective of the family of the Labdacids, a musical cadence, even before the official news of the successful defence of the city is announced. The lyrical ‘shuddering’ and ‘trembling’ of the chorus (720 *pephrika*, 790 *treō*) must elicit analogous responses in the theatre audience, very much as Aristotle outlines in his *Poetics*⁸³ – a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter. The chorus’s fears concerning the city’s demise and their own capture and violation are no longer so immediate and overwhelming: but their new awareness of the nightmare existence – and imminent extinction – of their city’s royal family is no less vivid and pitiful. Their music, we might say, is at this point less about war as such and more about longer-term family traumas.

In the final scenes of the play, the chorus’s role – and consequently the musical character of those scenes – is unfortunately uncertain, given the much-contested state of the manuscript tradition.⁸⁴ In the most probable reconstruction of Aeschylus’ original text, the chorus proceed to convert their laments and expressions of

anguish from singing about themselves and their personal terror concerning the future to outpourings of sadness and acknowledgment of the harsh fate experienced by the two young warriors who have died so horribly and unnaturally at each others' hands. The maidens are now conducting a ritual lament (*thrēnos*) – a routine which, as we noted earlier, would in fact be forbidden in Athens at this period yet would be quite familiar to all Athenians, from Homer's *Iliad*, from visual monuments such as the Dipylon vases, and from the current practice of many neighbouring Greek states, as well as from numerous lamentation scenes conducted in the Theatre of Dionysus.⁸⁵ Their antiphonal expressions of grief and dismay – still referring to the Erinyes and the curse but focusing more on the actual preparations for the brothers' burial – thus move us away from the political scenario of male political leadership and the 'captaincy of the ship' that was presented earlier in the play, dwelling instead on the finality of this family's fate and the loss of its sons and heirs. By this point, the chorus of young women are completely in charge of the theatre space, and their musical skills and gestures of lamentation are channelling the audience's final response to all that they have seen, without mediation from male authority figures or representatives of the polis.⁸⁶

Towards a conclusion: the effects and affects of war in Greek tragedy – ethics, aesthetics, 'religion'

What are we to say, then, about the audience's responses to these shifting musical currents in our play? What are we to make of the ways in which a play like *Seven* informs or reminds the Athenians about the horrors inflicted by war and the traumatic consequences of military and political decisions made by a city's or nation's leaders, even while it also entertains them with artfully designed sounds and sights and puzzles them with challenging moral and religious questions that defy simple answers? How did the Athenian audience react to this highly musical portrayal of a group of terrified Theban girls? And what is the effect and purpose of concluding the trilogy with a series of ritualized laments and musical expressions of this chorus's collective dismay?

We might wonder whether Aeschylus' tragedy provides a kind of anticipatory or exploratory trauma therapy, given music's well-attested powers of curing mental and spiritual malaise.⁸⁷ In the 'safe space' of the Theatre, his mass audience can be exposed, male and female alike, to potential perpetrators and potential victims, to the experience of war's terrors and sufferings, and to the political and religious pressures that drive people to commit such atrocities against their fellow human beings. Yet this exposure is presented to them in a basically pleasurable form and medium: the tears, shudders, anticipations, and horrified identification with others who are suffering *in extremis* are made poetic, made musical and formally/aesthetically pleasing.

What do we make of that, of taking such pleasure at watching and listening to a chorus like that of *Seven*? The answer is not simple. We certainly aren't being made more warlike and 'full of Ares' – but as we sit comfortably in our seats and watch the events unfold, are we being inured against the feelings of outrage and

moral dissatisfaction that, according to Plato and other moralistic critics, we ought to be feeling? Is the affect that we experience a substitute for intellectual and ethical engagement?⁸⁸ Or does Dionysian tragedy actually use its range of affective techniques to open us up to heightened awareness of ‘other’ points of view, other possibilities of feeling and being, than those we usually take for granted outside the theatre? If so, is such a heightened awareness liberating? or merely self-indulgent?

There are several different approaches that we might take. In terms of socio-political commentary, we might ask whether Aeschylus is presenting in this play a critique of monarchy and of the typically self-absorbed behaviour of aristocratic families, using the music only to highlight the broader social consequences and emotional costs of such behaviours.⁸⁹ (On that kind of critical reading, we might be expected to conclude that democracies work better in these respects and do not cause such social and personal havoc nor engage so recklessly in unnecessary bloodshed and wars – hardly a viable conclusion, we might observe, for fifth-century BCE democratic Athens, any more than for twentieth- and twenty-first-century CE USA.) Or is this play a critique of war itself, comparable to for example Simone Weil’s essay on *The Iliad, the Poem of Force*? Or perhaps a proto-feminist presentation of the sharp gender divisions that war elicits, and the different perspectives that men and women are likely to hold on the prospect and implications of battle and conquest? (But the behaviour of the chorus in the opening scenes and their ways of addressing the gods do not seem by any means exemplary, as several critics have noted: several of Eteocles’ criticisms of their excessive emotionality, even impiety, seem to be valid. And in the end, Eteocles’ successful defence of his city seems to remain as a positive achievement, even amidst his family’s devastation, since that defence has saved these women along with the rest of the Theban community.)⁹⁰

Or should we think instead of Aeschylus not so much as a political and social commentator but as rather a hyper-observant, humanistic man of the theatre, using all the affective and artistic means at his disposal to heighten the emotional and aesthetic impact of his drama – music being one of these means – without any further socio-political agenda?⁹¹ Is the play’s music then simply one of Aeschylus’ techniques for bringing his audience to experience and imagine as vividly as possible, from multiple different perspectives, the reactions and feelings produced by warfare, as an enrichment of their consciousness and as an exciting and novel aesthetic experience in its own right – we might say, as entertainment? On such an aestheticizing reading, tragedy (or at least, Aeschylean tragedy) may seem to be intended as a means of broadening our experience and providing satisfying sensory and emotional stimulation rather than changing our opinions.

It seems hard, if not impossible, to take *Seven* as a critique of war itself given the vividness with which Aeschylus brings home to us the absolute need for Eteocles and his champions to fight in defence of their city. No voice of disagreement or critique is included in the play, no suggestion that an alternative, peaceful resolution is possible. We do not know how Aeschylus presented the complex sequence of events that had led up to Polynices’ and Adrastus’ decision to lead an invading Argive army against Thebes, lacking as we do the two preceding plays of the

trilogy, which might have clarified these and other issues (or might not). Within *Seven* itself, we are told (by the messenger, at 631–49) that Polynices is predicting a ‘paean of triumph’ (633–5), calling on the gods of his fatherland (639–40), and bearing on his shield an image of Dikē (Justice) while proclaiming that she will restore him to the position that he is entitled to, as ruler of Thebes (643–48); but Eteocles tells us in response that Polynices has never acted justly since the moment of his birth and that Dikē has never had anything to do with him (662–7). Eteocles here and throughout the play is presented as the resourceful and devoted defender of his city and its people against external attack – and it doesn’t appear from this scene that we are meant to conclude that he should give up on the war effort and simply let the invaders in – especially as the chorus have described so vividly what the likely consequences will be for the current inhabitants of the city. Negotiation is impossible; defeat or surrender would be hideously disastrous: all-out defence seems to be the only option for Thebes.

As for the presentation of war’s sufferings, especially with regard to the treatment of female captives: Athenians would already be well aware of what the usual practices were in dealing with a captured city, and they hardly needed, we might think, a playwright to point these out to them. Some would recall the Athenian participation in the sacking of Sardis in 498 BCE; many more would remember the Persians’ retaliations during the more recent invasion of 480–79. And everyone was aware of how Greek *poleis* routinely behaved in their inter-city wars and power struggles or in intra-political feuds between ruling families.⁹² In our play, Eteocles, as we have seen, is a brave commander, driven by equal parts machismo and tactical skill – as well as by an out-of-control sibling rivalry and hatred – to take his own place at the Seventh Gate where (he himself points out) he belongs, even if that is at the same time the place into which the Erinys of his family has manoeuvred him so as to make sure of his horrible and unnatural death and the extinction of his family. His wise decisions, his fratricidal intentions, and his ugly death all seem horribly necessary, even appropriate: as he himself phrases the dilemma (673–5), ‘Who else is more right for this than I (*tis allos mallon endikōteros*)?’ And the play overall seems, like for example, Homer’s *Iliad*, even with its intermittent acknowledgment of the terrible consequences of full-scale inter-city warfare, to present this as an inevitable component of human and political existence, not as something that can or even should be abolished. A stronger case can be made that for example Euripides’ *Trojan Women* is an ‘anti-war’ play – but even that play presents and elicits contradictory views at every turn.⁹³ Wars will happen, and even *should* happen – or so virtually every classical Greek author known to us insists, or takes for granted. That is part of what a *polis* is for, and war making is a key part of what makes a free man a free man, a Greek a Greek. Without war, it is hard to prove the manliness (*andreia*) of a man or the superior political strength of a community and hard to acquire sufficient cheap slaves.⁹⁴ And in *Seven*, the sufferings and atrocities contemplated by the chorus are not in fact realized – their city is not captured – and they are in any case, we might say, no more shocking, perhaps less so, than those frequently depicted in poetic and visual accounts of the capture of Troy.⁹⁵

But if the play is not directly anti-war or proto-feminist, certainly it does not conform to the brief and simplistic description suggested in Aristophanes' *Frogs* ('a play full of Ares', promoting militarism and male valour). The lyric portrayals of war's horrors are an essential component of this tragedy, no less impactful than the descriptions of the stalwart champions and of Eteocles' resolve. What are we to make of this discrepancy in perceptions between Aristophanes' characters and ourselves? We return to our initial question: What did Aeschylus' singing chorus, his 'war music', do for his original Athenian audience? (How did it affect them?) What does it do for us, his modern audience(s)?⁹⁶

The Theatre of Dionysus was a place where the Athenians' imaginations were encouraged to roam more freely, where things could be said and (mimetically) 'done' (performed) that would not be permissible or desirable elsewhere.⁹⁷ The playwrights were licensed to open up the audience's minds and senses to a fantasy world (including an acoustic world) beyond their usual range of experience and also to explore disturbing and fearful aspects of their existence and of their society that they normally did not talk about and perhaps preferred not to think about, converting those fantasies and terrors into aesthetically delightful works of art.⁹⁸ A tragedy about the nature and consequences of war allowed/enabled a mixed audience of various ages and social classes, and to some degree probably of genders too,⁹⁹ to experience together – vicariously, but vividly – what is involved and what war is like, from the perspectives of the vanquished as well as the victors. As they watched and listened, audience members would adopt the subject positions alternately, not only of the elite and ambitious main characters of these plays whose decisions and sufferings dominate the stage (in this case, Eteocles in his grim deliberations and angry outbursts) but also of characters of lower status, men and women who just want to stay out of trouble and get through life unscathed – the messengers, scouts, servants, nurses, tutors, and choruses who watch, worry about, criticize, and interact with those domineering royal 'heroes' and 'heroines' but who will almost always (we know) – unlike those heroes – survive the tragic calamity intact and relatively untraumatized.¹⁰⁰ And in the case of a tragic chorus, their musicality is able to provide a collective voice and an acoustic/expressive power that the audience can vicariously enjoy and even, we might say, regard as almost their own – a different kind of privilege and psychological empowerment, to set against the solemn and more restricted tonal and rhythmic constraints that have to be observed by the (socially superior) male protagonists. (I will return in a moment to this idea that the collective singing voice and dancing bodies of the chorus present an empowering imaginative alter ego for the audience themselves.)

Plato, of course, did not think that vicarious experience of such emotional states and exploration of such fantasies was good for anyone. Both in the *Republic* and in the *Laws* it is argued that feeling such improper emotions in the first place or imitating/representing/expressing them for others to watch and listen to (through the process of *mimēsis* in the theatre or through character-building choral dances) can only weaken and corrupt the souls of young and impressionable citizens and would provide rotten examples of human and divine behaviour for audiences to be influenced by. For Plato, tragedies of the Aeschylean type simply do not belong in

an ideal city, and it is unthinkable that intelligent people should want to adopt the subject positions of panicking maidens or should relish listening to a song about an inescapable, curse-induced Erinys.

We need not engage here at any length with Plato's (notorious) views on drama; but we may note that in the *Laws* his Athenian Visitor seems actually to echo our play in particular:

[ATH.] Suppose a large and powerful army, whether Greek or not, were to force its way into the country and make them [the citizens] fight a desperate battle for the very existence of the state. It would be a disaster for their society if its women proved to have been so shockingly ill-educated that they couldn't even rival female birds, who are prepared to run every risk and die for their chicks fighting against the most powerful of wild animals. What if, instead of that, the women promptly made off to temples and thronged every altar and sanctuary, and thus covered the human race with the disgrace of being by nature the most cowardly of all creatures? . . . So let's lay down a law to the effect that women must not neglect to cultivate the techniques of war, at any rate to the extent indicated. These are skills that all citizens, male and female, must take care to acquire.

(Plato *Laws* 7.814b–c)¹⁰¹

That is to say, Plato's Athenian Visitor would be especially disapproving of a play that shows women responding in this hyper-emotional (and misguided religious) way rather than contributing valiantly themselves to the war effort, just as Socrates in the *Republic* would abhor the *mimēsis* of a political leader who erupts as Eteocles does into expressions of anger, hatred, and accusations against the gods rather than exhibiting calm and purely rational decision making. And these Platonic complaints bring us back to our own inquiry as to *why* the Athenians enjoyed going to the theatre to watch such dreadful scenes and to experience such frantically mixed feelings and *why* Aeschylus designed a play that highlights such extreme emotionality and brings the audience to share so immediately – thanks especially to the musical components that we have explored – in these feelings of panic, desperation, dependency, loss, and resignation.

A good answer (or at least part of the answer) may be found, as often, by consulting Aristotle. Aristotle is often accused by modern critics of being too bookish and cerebral (or medicinal) and too formalistic and aestheticizing in his analysis of tragedy.¹⁰² I think this accusation is mistaken (though this is not the moment to defend Aristotle in detail). It is true that he seems to have no interest in the idea that tragedy might provide political or religious commentary and critique. But he is intensely interested in the cognitive and affective processes that go on during the performance and watching of a tragedy; and he thinks that ethical judgments and fine-tuning of sympathies are central to an audience's engagement and satisfaction. At the same time, he believes that without a hefty component of *pathos* ('affect') no worthwhile tragic effect is possible.¹⁰³ And in both the *Poetics* and the *Politics* Aristotle also makes clear that he thinks music

is uniquely effective at arousing emotional responses and altering an audience's psychological/affective state.

In his basic definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 6. 1449b23–28) Aristotle includes *melos* (music, melody) as one of the six component 'parts' (along with plot, character, ideas, language, and visuals): 'tragedy is a representation/performance (*mimēsis*) of a serious/important action (*spoudaias praxeōs*) . . . with pleasurably-enhanced <or "embellished"> language (*hēdusmenōi logōi*). . . . ' He goes on to expand a little on this latter phrase, explaining that it involves, along with elaborated language and metrical speech (*lexis*), also the *hēdusmata* ('spice, seasonings, flavour') that melody and rhythm provide.¹⁰⁴ In chapter 4 he has likewise observed that delight in *harmonia* and *rhythmos* is basic to human nature and is a key reason for the invention and development of drama and other forms of representational/expressive art.¹⁰⁵ In Book 8 of the *Politics* he goes into more detail about the expressive and affective capabilities of music and particularly focuses on the exciting and mood-altering effects of Dionysian performance (see nn. 34, 55).¹⁰⁶

Aristotle's observations about the effects of (certain kinds of) music show that he is well attuned to the enhancement that music can provide to a dramatic performance. He also insists in both the *Poetics* and the *Politics* that music is inherently enjoyable, even when it is conveying/expressing disturbing emotions or sad moods – and many modern musicologists, neuroscientists, and aestheticians have agreed. Thus, although Aristotle does not discuss choral lyrics specifically in the *Poetics*, his focus throughout that treatise on the pleasure experienced by audiences as they watch and listen to extreme suffering (*pathos*) onstage and his interest in the ways in which an audience itself responds with strong emotions (especially pity [*eleos*] and fear [*phobos*]) to the action and characters of a well-designed tragedy, all suggests that he is fully alert to this (musical) aspect of performance – especially given that so many of the most pitiful and fearful scenes in Greek tragedy, as we have seen, are conducted in lyric meters, that is with musical enhancement (*hēdusmenos logos*). Indeed, in Aristotle's view, the full 'tragic' effect cannot properly be achieved without music, and this is one of the reasons he regards tragedy as a more complete and exciting art form than epic.¹⁰⁷ We must think too that even the neatness and patterning that Aristotle so admires in the plot (*muthos*) of a play like Sophocles' *OT* must be related to the 'rhythm and harmony' of that play's musical structure (cf. *Poet.* ch. 4). Aristotle is convinced that an audience's feelings of fear and pity (which are conditioned in part by processes of identification and sympathy) will necessarily involve a peculiar mixture of pain and pleasure, and this aestheticizing/affective view of the tragic effect has often been promoted by others since (with or without acknowledgment of Aristotle), though it has no less often been resisted and rejected.¹⁰⁸

The passage from Aristophanes' *Frogs* that we sampled near the beginning of this chapter actually contains, I think, in the (seemingly frivolous but not thoughtless) commentary that 'Dionysus' offers there, an important insight into the effect on an audience of watching a chorus perform an anxious and grief-filled song and dance in the theatre. After 'Aeschylus' claims (1026–7) that his production of *Persians* 'taught [the Athenians] always to desire to defeat their enemies', Dionysus

responds (rather flippantly, as usual) that indeed he was delighted while watching that play, and he singles out as the main source of his pleasure the exotic musicality of the chorus of Persian Elders: (1028–9): ‘Yes, I really enjoyed it when the chorus listened to dead Darius and right away clapped their hands together like this (*hōdi*) and said ‘*iauoi*!’” Our manuscripts of Aeschylus’ *Persians* do not actually contain the word *iauoi*; but the text is full of multiple expressions of woe (*EE*, *IŌ*, *OTOTOI*, etc.) along with frequent references to the chorus beating their heads, their clothing, and the ground (see above, p. 121).¹⁰⁹ The experience of watching and listening to these scenes of enemies lamenting pitifully, abjectly, and noisily, consulting with the ghosts of the dead, and singing and dancing exotically all the while, is (as Dionysus observes) highly pleasurable – and his enjoyment does not appear to have been derived simply from *Schadenfreude* (i.e. pleasure at an enemy’s discomfort) but also from a delight at the unusual vocalizings, clapping, and visual spectacle.

‘Aestheticizing’ is one term we might use, then, for the imparting of exquisite formal structure and control and the deployment of expert artistic techniques to render representations of human suffering beautiful and enjoyable for others to watch and/or listen to. Another term might be ‘religiosity’ – not in the sense (too often invoked in relation to the interpretation of Greek tragedy) of referring to the gods or other superhuman entities to ‘explain’ or ‘justify’ the painful events on stage but rather in the sense of the eliciting of ‘wonder, awe, amazement, uplift,’ the altered psychological states in which people feel themselves temporarily transported into a closer relationship with greater-than-human powers or with the cosmos as a whole. ‘Art’ and ‘religion’ seem almost always to be closely related (at least in pre-modern societies); and almost all known societies have employed music extensively (and in many different ways) in their religious activities.¹¹⁰ The affective states of wonder, yearning and need, comfort and joy, sense of being together (with the divine and/or with the rest of a group) are all fostered by (various kinds of) musical performance, and all of them belong also to the experiences that we think of as being ‘religious’.¹¹¹

Religious and secular musics need not and often do not sound different from one another.¹¹² In the ancient Greek context they certainly did not. A tragic chorus such as that of Aeschylus’ *Seven* taps into a deeply resonant reserve of ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘sacred’ music (in Aristotle’s terminology), involving as it does a group of singers accompanied by the double pipes, performing in Lydian and Phrygian modes, and often even imitating the conventions of hymnic or lament traditions. The mood-altering effects of their music – a state of uplift, being ‘moved’, ‘possession’ by god (*enthousiasmos*), excitement, and transformation, whatever we wish to call it – take the audience (briefly, and dynamically) out of their normal physiological and mental habitus and bring them collectively into an enhanced, or at least different, state of awareness and connection to their surroundings.¹¹³

A couple of highly successful productions of (adapted) Greek tragedies based on the Oedipus story have demonstrated this process (empirically) rather convincingly in recent years: Julie Taymor’s production of Stravinsky/Cocteau’s *Oedipus Rex* (based on Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*; originally composed and presented as

a rather austere oratorio in 1927 but spectacularly staged by Taymor with dancers, masks, puppets, and more in Japan in 1992); and Lee Breuer's and Bob Telson's *Gospel at Colonus* (based on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, in Robert Fitzgerald's translation; staged several times between 1983 and the present).¹¹⁴ Both of these productions – which many regard as among the most powerful and moving productions of a Greek drama ever attempted in the modern era – are dominated by music; and even while individual solo singers shine at various points in both performances, and there are fine moments in the spoken narration or dialogue and several spectacular visual effects as well (especially in Taymor's piece), it is the choral passages that make the greatest impact of all. In both productions a remarkable integration of the choral group into the flow of the play is achieved, while at the same time the chorus remains qualitatively distinct from the individual characters, in its musical idioms as well as its choreography and closer relation to the theatre audience. Both of these productions could be said to have imported into the Greek play a recognizably Christian element, in terms both of plot structure and musical idiom: to that extent they can be said to be not authentic in their religiosity. At the same time, the brilliantly designed and executed musical elements do succeed to an unusual degree in drawing the audience into a dynamic and 'inspired' response to the stage action, much as I am suggesting the original music of a play like *Seven* did: and this response has many of the characteristics of a religious response.

A Greek tragedy is obviously not a 'religious ceremony' in any normal sense of that term. But it also is not a documentary, nor a historical narrative or lesson – again, Aristotle insists on the difference between history and tragedy (*Poet.* 9. 1451a35–51b32). It is a 'play', a fantasy. However much painful, disturbing truth and reality a tragedy may contain – in this case, truth about the horrors of war, about the complex and confused motives that impel leaders into war, and about the dreadful consequences of intra-familial hatreds, and so on – every drama presented in the Theatre of Dionysus is also designed to engage an audience in such a way that they may share (to some degree) the experience of both the victims and the perpetrators, while at the same time feeling safe in their seats and secure in the knowledge that they will not personally get harmed. The audience's normal states of awareness – and their comfort level – are altered for an hour or two as they are transported into unfamiliar, fantasized states of excitement, sympathy, fear, astonishment, desire, aversion – and ultimately relief – both through their identification with different characters' situations and attitudes in the play and also through the acoustic impact of those characters' voices and of the accompanying *auloi*. We might say that Aeschylus in the *Seven* is not 'teaching' his audience anything new about the rights and wrongs of war or war's effects, nor about religion; but he is bringing home to them in a new and uniquely (synaesthetically) expressive way what that 'serious action' (*spoudaia praxis*) is like and how the gods might be imagined as working – what it *feels like* for all involved (tragedy as a multi-faceted *pathos* machine).

That is what Dionysus – and theatre in general – can do in ways that history and philosophy or political science cannot. In the case of musical theatre, it is not that

the music makes the action more realistic or more understandable in intellectual terms – obviously, people do not usually sing when they are scared or suffering deeply, nor when they are trying to persuade someone else not to undertake a murderous act or attempting to explain the workings of a family curse.¹¹⁵ But music's power to alter an audience's mood and shape their affective responses makes it perhaps the most valuable tool of all in a Dionysian artist's repertoire.¹¹⁶

Notes

- 1 For introductions to ancient Greek musical culture in general, see Barker 1984, 2012, Comotti 1989 (especially recommended as a place to start), West 1992, Mathiesen 1999. For a good general introduction to the study of music of all kinds as it operates in cultures around the world (ethnomusicology), see Nettl 2005. On the origins of human musicality and the nature of early hominid music, see Wallin et al. 2000, Mithen 2006, Tomlinson 2015.
- 2 Among humans as among animals, 'signals' and 'calls' are often distinguished from 'song' and 'music' by ethnomusicologists and zoologists: see e.g. Wallin et al. 2000, Marler and Slabbekoorn 2004.
- 3 The first verse and chorus of *La Marseillaise* run: 'Allons enfants de la Patrie, / Le jour de gloire est arrivé! / Contre nous de la tyrannie, / L'étendard sanglant est levé, / Entendez-vous dans les campagnes / Mugir ces féroces soldats? / Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras / Égorger vos fils, vos compagnes! // Aux armes, citoyens, / Formez vos bataillons, / Marchons, marchons! / Qu'un sang impur / Abreuve nos sillons!' Less bloodthirsty, but even more self-righteous, are the lyrics of *Rule, Britannia!* (lyrics by James Thomson, music by Thomas Arne, 1740): 'When Britain first, at Heaven's command / Arose from out the azure main; / This was the charter of the land, / And guardian angels sang this strain: / 'Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves: / Britons never will be slaves.'" The melody has since been often borrowed and reworked by other composers. Another British war-song, familiar to many and more militaristic in tone, is the *British Grenadiers*: 'Some talk of Alexander, some talk of Hercules / Of Hector and Lysander and such great names as these./ But of all the world's great heroes, there's none that can compare/ With a tow-row-row-row-row-row-row, to the British Grenadier(s), etc.'
- 4 At the time, it was highly successful and a big money maker for Beethoven. Later critical assessments have been less positive.
- 5 Famous theme tunes from war movies (or from movies with strongly military aspects) are celebrated on various online websites: e.g. <http://www.allmusic.com/album/the-greatest-war-movie-themes-mw0002026735>, and <http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/18373/the-all-time-greatest-war-movie-themes> (accessed 21/7/16).
- 6 The next step was to massacre every single inhabitant of the city: men, women, and children – except for one, Rahab the harlot. Biblical war was no less brutal than ancient Greek war and had a tendency to be more ethnically inflected.
- 7 Aeschylus, according to his own epitaph, himself fought at Marathon; one of his brothers, Cynegirus, was killed in that battle; and Aminias, honoured for exceptional military brilliance at Salamis, may have been another of his brothers. See the extensive *Testimonia* in Radt's edition of Aeschylus' fragments: *TrGF* 3 T 11–51.
- 8 On innovations and the competitive desire for novelty in Greek music, see esp. Barker 1984:93–8 and Index s.v. 'novelty'; Csapo 2002, D'Angour 2011, LeVen 2014, Gurd 2016.
- 9 Barner 1971 (and cf. Rode 1971); Hall 1999, 2002, Csapo 2002.
- 10 Most Anglophone scholars, myself included, are convinced that in the original Aeschylean version of the play the two daughters did not appear at all and that the final scene with the herald is spurious. The additions are believed to have been made later in the fifth or early fourth century BCE in response to Sophocles' and Euripides'

extremely successful *Antigone* plays, which dealt with the same subject. Among French and Italian scholars belief in the authenticity of the daughters' presence and of that whole final scene is more widespread. See e.g. Torrance 2007:19–20, Sommerstein 2010a:90–3 (with further refs) for fuller discussion.

- 11 For detailed description and analysis of the types of melodies composed for tragedy at various dates, see esp. West 1992:277–326, Pöhlmann and West 2001, Hagel 2010; and for post-fifth-century performances and re-performances, see also Prauscello 2006, Griffith 2017a. The choral dochmiacs of Euripides' *Orestes* 338–44, partially preserved with musical notation on a third-century BCE papyrus (discussed on p. 126 with n.56), provide a tantalizing taste of typical late-Euripidean melodies. No surviving papyrus text from any Aeschylean play contains musical annotation.
- 12 For the dances of Greek tragedy in general, see the images reproduced in e.g. Pickard-Cambridge 1968 and the sources collected in Csapo and Slater 1995:360–8; and discussion in Lawler 1964, Naerebout 1997:174–289. We are better informed about the dance-steps of satyr-drama than about tragedy: Krumeich et al. 1999 (Tafeln), Seidensticker 2008.
- 13 Our uncertainty is caused partly by the fact that we have just been told a few lines earlier (21e2–8) that 'Aeschylus himself used to invent many dance-steps and pass them on to the members of his chorus. . . . Chamaeleon says that he [Aeschylus] was the first to set the dance-steps for his choruses himself without using a dance-teacher (*prōton* . . . *schēmatissai tous chorous orchēstodidaskalois ou chrēsamenon*).' Chamaeleon was a student of Aristotle, i.e. late fourth century BCE, and thus much closer to Aeschylus' era than the source (Aristocles), who says that Telestes was 'Aeschylus' dance-teacher.'
- 14 Papastamati-von Moock 2015, with further references; cf. too Taplin 1977. Probably the orchestra was rectangular or trapezoidal in shape (rather than circular), and the (wooden) seats in the auditorium were likewise arranged in rectilinear rather than curving configuration.
- 15 See e.g. Taplin 1977, Gruber 2008:166–7; *contra* Hutchinson 1985:56–7, arguing for a unified choral entrance. Other likely examples of 'sporadic' choral entrance are: Aesch. *Eumenides*; Soph. *Ajax* 866–78; [Eur.] *Rhesus* 674–91; and cf. Pollux 4. 109.
- 16 So Aristotle, for example, observes in the *Politics* (Book 8) that different types of music serve several different social purposes without mentioning war specifically. He would presumably classify war-music within the general category of 'practical, action-oriented' music (*Pol.* 8. 6.1341b32–4, 7.1342a1–15). It may be observed that among musical animals (birds, gibbons, humpback whales, for example) songs – as distinct from 'calls' – are never apparently deployed for directly aggressive and violent purposes but instead for attracting a mate or collaborating with others within the group: see the essays in Wallin et al. 2000; also Marler and Slabbekoorn 2004, Kroodsma 2005.
- 17 Thuc. 5.70, Plut. *Lyc.* 21.4, 22.4–5; Hdt. 1.17.1; etc. See further Pritchett 1971:105–8, West 1992:29–30 (with refs also to visual representations, including the well-known Chigi Vase).
- 18 West 1992:15–16; cf. Aesch. *Persians* 386–97 (discussed earlier).
- 19 Barker 1984:289–90, West 1992:158, Lonsdale 1993, Ceccarelli 1998.
- 20 Actually, a war paean is mentioned twice in the course of the play (218, 633–5), as well as a war cry (217 *ololugmos*); but these references are made by individual characters who are *speaking* iambic trimeters, not actually singing.
- 21 The majority of the choruses in our surviving Greek tragedies are comprised of women (though Sophocles' choruses in *Antigone* and *OC* are senior citizen men); cf. Foley 2003. As we shall see, this difference is important in musical terms as well as having other dramatic implications. For extensive discussion of the composition and roles of Aeschylus' tragic choruses, see Gruber 2008 (including full discussion of previous scholarship); but Gruber himself generally downplays gender difference and concentrates more on the chorus' role as representative of the whole *polis*/community. The

- (fascinating) question, to what degree did the Athenian citizen-men-dressed-as-women who constituted a tragic chorus attempt – and succeed – in singing like actual women (let alone, like Trojan/Phrygian, Theban, or Egyptian women . . .), cannot, alas, begin to be answered on the available evidence.
- 22 The names of these harp-type instruments are not certain: probably the triangular-shaped *trigōnon* was one; and the *pēktis* may have been another: see West 1992:71–9, Landels 1999:73–7, Mathiesen 1999:235–8, 270–86; for illustrations, see esp. Bundrick 2005. After the mid-fourth century BCE, we have documentation also for a lute-type (necked) string instrument, perhaps called *pandoura*, likewise apparently restricted to female players (West 1992:79–80). Lutes were common in neighbouring societies but are curiously absent from the surviving remains of sixth- and fifth-century Greek culture.
 - 23 West 1992:122–8, Landels 1999:81–5, Mathiesen 1999:162–76, Bundrick 2005, Kolotourou 2011, Griffith in progress.
 - 24 Non-citizen men too seem to have enjoyed greater freedom than Athenian citizen males in their use of different instruments and various musical ‘colours’. See further Griffith in progress.
 - 25 For discussion of the apparent paucity of female choruses in Athens, as compared with other Greek communities, see Budelmann and Power 2015 (showing that female ‘Bacchic’ choruses of various kinds were not uncommon in Athens, though institutionalized, polis-organized female choruses of other kinds were indeed less prevalent than elsewhere). See in general Calame 1997, Stehle 1997, Dillon 2002, etc. More ‘exotic’ divinities (such as Adonis, Sabazius) seem to have been celebrated musically by women more than by men; likewise various kinds of ‘Corybantic’-style performance: Goff 2004, Kolotourou 2011, Reitzammer 2016, Griffith 2017b.
 - 26 Karanika 2014.
 - 27 Holst-Warhaft 1992, Alexiou 2002, Suter 2008.
 - 28 Plutarch *Life of Solon* 21.4; cf. Dipylon vases. For this issue in Athenian tragedy, see Foley 2001. One may compare also the recommended restrictions on musical lamentation in Magnesia proposed by the Athenian Visitor in Plato’s *Laws* (800e).
 - 29 Hall 1999, pointing out that Greek men in tragedy rarely are given singing roles: actors’ singing is confined largely to female characters (Electra, Cassandra, Hecuba, etc.) or to foreign potentates (Xerxes, Polymestor, etc.). Our play maintains this convention, as Eteocles does not sing at all.
 - 30 Hypoth. Aesch. *Pers.* = *TrGF* 1 3 T 5, F 8–12. For Phrynichus’ musicality and choreographic expertise as a playwright, see Aristoph. *Wasps* 219–20, 269, *Thesm.* 1614–67, *Frogs* 1298–301, and other *Testimonia* at *TrGF* 1 3 (pp. 69–72).
 - 31 For further discussion of this final scene, see Hopman 2013 with references.
 - 32 Aristotle here uses the term *pathēma*, whereas elsewhere in the *Poetics* he mostly uses *pathos*; but most scholars think (rightly) that the meaning is basically the same, that is, an ‘affection’ or (in non-technical contemporary English parlance) ‘emotion’ experienced by the audience. (I will not discuss alternative interpretations here.) For careful discussion of Aristotle’s ideas about *mimēsis* and affect/emotion, see esp. Halliwell 1998, 2002.
 - 33 For discussion of these processes of identification/empathy/shifting subject position in ancient Greek theatre audiences, see e.g. Zeitlin 1996 (on ‘playing the other’, esp. with regard to gender), Griffith 1995:72–81 (with reference to film studies as well as theatre), 1999:34–8, 58–66, 2006 *passim*, 2015 *passim*, Visvardi 2015:19–46 (focusing on ‘collective emotion’ in tragedy, esp. with regard to ‘civilizing the passions’ through representations of group discussions and socio-political actions in drama). For the audience’s relation to the chorus in particular, see esp. Henrichs 1994–1995, 1996, Mastronarde 1998, 1999, Foley 2003, Gruber 2008 (with extensive bibliography), Murnaghan 2011, Gagné and Hopman 2013, Visvardi 2015 (esp. 147–78 focusing on *Seven*), Griffith 2015:6–10, 14–6, 22–57, 76–9, 91–6 [drawing from Griffith 1995, 2002, 2005, 2006], with further references.

- 34 Music is intrinsically ‘corporeal’ and visceral in terms both of the physicality of the impact made by musical sounds on the ear and nervous system and of the common affective responses of listeners to music, which more often than not involve rhythmic and other bodily reactions, including hormonal changes that may include the release of oxytocin, dopamine, and other endorphins. Most audiences move, consciously or unconsciously, when listening to music and watching dance. (See also Meineck, in this volume, on kinesthetic empathy.) The modern Western habit of sitting silent and motionless in a concert hall (or wearing headphones or earbuds) to listen to music or watch, for example, ballet, is not typical of most societies throughout history. For further discussion of these issues, see Becker 2001:136–8, 141–50, Nettl 2005:16–26, 50–9, Peponi 2012, Griffith in progress; also Aristotle *De Anima* 2. 8, *Pol.* 8, and [ps. Aristotle] *On Things Heard, Problems* 19, writing about the ‘movements’ in the air (generated by voices or instruments) that cause equivalent ‘movement, reaction’ (*kinēsis, pathos*) and ‘alteration’ (*alloiōsis, metabolē*) in the soul of a listener.
- 35 See Meyer 1956 for a classic (and still generally accepted) account of the formal/aesthetic elements that provide pleasure to people as they listen to music; similarly, for example, Keil and Feld 1994, Levitin 2006, Patel 2008, Bicknell 2009 (these last three all discussing recent neuroscientific research as well).
- 36 For good descriptions of the *auloi* (and *tibia*), see esp. West 1992:81–107, 366–7, Hagel 2010, Moore 2012:26–63; and see further nn. 49 and 74 below.
- 37 Henrichs 1994–1995, Calame 1997, 2013, Mastronarde 1998, 1999, Kowalzig 2007, Gruber 2009, Murnaghan 2011, Visvardi 2015; and see n.33 above. Thousands of Athenian men would themselves have experience singing and dancing in choruses (to *aulos*-accompaniment), for example in the annual dithyrambic contests in the Theatre of Dionysus, which involved 20 choruses of 50 each: see further Revermann 2006.
- 38 See e.g. Levitin 2006, Bicknell 2009, with further references; also Peponi 2012.
- 39 The word *Erinys* itself is an exotic-sounding and evocative word: non-Greek in origin, rare in normal discourse and in prose of any kind, but especially favoured in tragedy for its eerie and chilling associations; see Sommerstein 1989:6–10. The Latin *Furia* (from which the English translation ‘Fury’ comes) lacks these exotic associations.
- 40 For detailed discussion of this chorus’ language and attitudes in the first half of the play and also the sound effects activated by their singing, see Judet de La Combe 1998, Bruit-Zaidman 1991, Goff 1995, Byrne 1997, Ieranò 1999, Edmunds 2002, Stehle 2005, Torrance 2007, Gruber 2009:164–88, Visvardi 2015:147–50, 157–9, as well as Hutchinson 1985.
- 41 Alexiou 2002, Suter 2008.
- 42 Dué 2002.
- 43 The phrase is taken from Gayle Ruben’s classic article (Rubin 1975), though war is not her focus there; see too Wohl 1998. In the twenty-first century, scores of thousands of sex workers around the world come from communities and families ravaged by invasion, civil war, or other forms of military violence; see e.g. Nikolic-Ristanovic 2003. For ancient Greek practices of warfare, rape, and enslavement (*andrapodismos*), see Raaf-laub 2001, 2014, Gaca 2010, 2015, and Meineck in this volume (with further references).
- 44 See Loraux 1998, Wohl 2015:39–49 (with further references), Weiss 2017:ch. 2.
- 45 Obviously the loss of the first two plays of Aeschylus’ Theban trilogy means that we cannot be absolutely sure that the invading army and its champions are indeed as unjustified and sacrilegious, and the six defending Theban champions as virtuous, as they are presented in *Seven*. But the shield symbols described in the Scout’s and Eteocles’ speeches seem pretty conclusive as to the greater degree of justice and divine approval belonging to the defenders of the city. In the cases of *Ag.* and *Supp.*, the rights and wrongs of Cassandra’s and of the Danaids’ predicaments are less easy to untangle.
- 46 Zeitlin 1990a. See also Edmunds in this volume.

- 47 Increasingly too, as the years went by, the actors – whose singing roles steadily increased in tragedy after the introduction in the 440s BCE of a prize for actors at the City Dionysia – tended to be non-Athenian.
- 48 Berlinzani 2004, Griffith in progress.
- 49 Hence, perhaps, the various attempts at anti-*aulos* propaganda mounted by elite Athenian writers of the mid-fifth and early fourth centuries, including the newly invented tradition of Apollo's defeat of the pipe-playing satyr Marsyas: see Wilson 1999, Martin 2003, Griffith in progress. For Theban musical expertise, see further Barker 1984:ch. 13 (on Theophrastus' account of reed production and manufacture for *auloi* in Boeotia), West 1992:366–7; and for the extensive records of Boeotian music festivals, see Manieri 2009. On the Theban poet Pindar's engagement with the Seven against Thebes myth, see Foster in this volume.
- 50 One vivid confirmation of this is of course the so-called Pronomos Vase (*ARV*2 1336,1), a late-fifth-century Athenian painted pot that features the Theban piper Pronomos as its centrepiece: see Taplin and Wyles 2008.
- 51 For discussion of the formal structure, meters, and rhythmical dynamics of our play's lyrics, see esp. Scott 1984:158–65, Hutchinson 1985, Judet de La Combe 1998, Torrance 2007.
- 52 See above, n.15.
- 53 For extended discussion of this chorus's group identity and its relationship to Eteocles, to the gods, and to the *polis* as a whole, see Zeitlin 1990b, Torrance 2007:14–16, 51–5, 93–107, Gruber 2008:164–78, 185–96, Visvardi 2015:147–78.
- 54 Dochmiacs are not found in choral or monodic lyric. (By contrast, almost all the other lyric metres found in extant tragedy are also found in one or both of those earlier lyric contexts.) For extended discussion of the characteristics of the dochmiac metre, see esp. Dale 1968, West 1982, Medda 1995.
- 55 The question of whether/how music (without words) can 'express' emotion is much debated nowadays, as it was also in antiquity: see esp. Aristotle *Politics* 8.5.1339b11–40b18, 7.1341b32–42b33 (also *Problemata* 19), with Sifakis 2001, Halliwell 2002, and (with more focus on Plato) Peponi 2012; for modern debates, see e.g. Meyer 1956, Kivy 1990, Juslin and Sloboda 2001, Davies 2003, Patel 2008, Bicknell 2009, Juslin 2011. But there has been general agreement on all sides that music can 'arouse' feelings and emotions (or 'affect') in listeners and can contribute to altering their mood and mental state in many different ways: Aristotle uses such terms as *pathos*, *kinēsis* ('movement'), *metabolē* ('change'), and *alloiōsis* ('alteration') for the responses of the human soul (*psychē*) to listening to affective music.
- 56 Pap. Vienna G 2315, containing parts of lines 338–44; see West 1992:277–8, 283–5, Pöhlmann and West 2001:12–17, Prauscello 2006. The papyrus seems to date from the third century BCE, and the melody (in either Lydian or Phrygian *harmonia*, and either enharmonic or chromatic *genos* – all fairly standard for fifth-century tragic music) is likely to be actually the one composed by Euripides rather than a subsequent composition by a later recitalist or adaptor/performer of the play. In this passage the chorus are expressing in dochmiac metre their dismay and sympathy at the spectacle of Orestes, lying on his sickbed, sleepless, tossing and turning, and crazed with guilt about the murder of his mother.
- 57 *Threomai* is used only of women speaking or shouting (LSJ s.v.). Related words such as *throēō*, *throos* often refer to the murmur or confused babble of a multitude or occasionally of the sound of a choral hymn (Pindar *Nem.* 7. 81) or the musical pipes (Pindar *Paean* 9.36 = fr. 52k. 36).
- 58 My thanks to Mario Telò for pointing this out to me.
- 59 It is possible that some of these exclamations could have been metrical, whether in iambic or dochmiac rhythm. The scansion of such interjections in tragedy is often doubtful, esp. because of the unreliability of the MS tradition.

- 60 It is an on-going (small but not insignificant) conundrum for all critics whether to refer to the ‘spectators’ or to the ‘audience’ of a Greek tragedy. In this chapter I will mostly use ‘audience’ or ‘listeners’.
- 61 Ieranò 1999, Edmunds 2002, Butler and Purves 2013.
- 62 For discussion of ancient testimony about the choreography for this play (designed by Telestes? in collaboration with Aeschylus?) which apparently made the external action ‘appear vividly’ (*phanera*) to the audience, see n.13 above.
- 63 We know almost nothing for certain about the performance conventions of tragic choruses; but real-life choruses – especially choruses of women – frequently employed castanets or clappers (*krotala*, *krembala*), and occasionally even cymbals (*kumbala*) as well as clapping of hands, beating of parts of the body, and foot-stamping as additional percussive effects to enhance their singing and dancing. See further West 1992, Peponi 2009, and the passage from Aesch. *Persians* discussed above (p. 121). I see no good reason for supposing that men playing the role of a female chorus in tragedy would not have employed these same instruments, as seems esp. obvious in the cases of e.g. Aeschylus’ *Lykourgeia* tetralogy and Euripides’ *Bacchae*.
- 64 See above n.56, on the melody of the *Orestes* musical papyrus, and p. 126, and cf. Meineck p. 66 in this volume, on the highly affective properties of the *auloi*. Western opera provides another context in which extreme human misery can be transformed into exquisitely beautiful music. I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter.
- 65 Again, I am grateful to Mario Telò for several of the observations and formulations in this paragraph.
- 66 There is apparently no central palace or temple or house employed in this play, and modern scholars have conjectured that such possibilities for set construction were not yet available to playwrights; see above n.14 (and specific discussion of our play in Taplin 1977); but for a contrary argument (again focused specifically on *Seven*), see Seaford 2012:337–9.
- 67 In this last phrase (‘be mindful of our rites!’) the word *orgiōn* (from *orgia* = ‘rituals, rites’) is etymologically related to *erga*, the Greek word for ‘actions’, just as in the reciprocal process of prayer to the gods one ‘act’ of human devotion is expected to be repaid by another ‘act’ of divine assistance.
- 68 Polynices, a Theban, has married the daughter of the King of Argos and has mustered a ‘foreign’ army of allies to help his bid to regain the throne. As many critics have observed, the analogy with the expelled Athenian tyrant Hippias, who accompanied the invading Persian army at Marathon (Hdt 6.102–8), would not have been far from the minds of some of the older audience members, even though the ‘foreignness’ of Aeolic (Theban) versus Argive (Doric) dialect would not have been so extreme as that of the Persian troops versus the Attic Greek-speaking Athenians.
- 69 I need not here get into the interesting but vexed issue of the ritual correctness, or otherwise, of the chorus’s behaviour in this opening scene; see e.g. Stehle 2005, Torrance 2007:51–6, with further references.
- 70 See Dale 1968; on the metrical patterning of the *Oresteia*, see esp. Scott 1984.
- 71 The first words of strophe and antistrophe echo one another, both grammatically and rhythmically: 321 *oiktron* . . . 353 *klauton*.
- 72 That is to say, the young women (*parthenoi*) of a captured city – such as these chorus women – will suffer ‘a fate worse than death’.
- 73 The term used here for ‘captured, subdued’, *damasthēi*, is also used for ‘subduing’ a new bride, and *damar* is a standard Greek term for ‘wife’.
- 74 The associations of these *auloi*-pipes must have been manifold among the theatre audience. Not only did soldiers and sailors often fight battles to the sound of *auloi* (see above, pp. 118–19) – and might even hear them played while a captured city’s walls were being demolished (cf. Xenophon *Hell* 2.2.23) – but everyone would also be familiar with the sound of *auloi* playing as a bride was led away from her father’s house into her new husband’s bedroom on her wedding night. Contrastingly, *auloi*

would often be played as people gathered to mourn the dead (as e.g. 500 years later, at Matthew 9:18–25). So in the Theatre of Dionysus the evocative effect of a noisily wailing/singing chorus plus *aulos*-player could greatly enhance the immediacy of this moment of fantasizing/recollection/‘imagining’ (356 *eikasai*) the realities of war and its ‘music’, weirdly blended with the music of marital consummation.

- 75 The Greek text here is uncertain in places, but the general sense is not in doubt.
- 76 Sommerstein translates line 368: ‘the climax of . . . their afflictions.’ Cf. Briseis in Homer *Iliad* 19. 282–303, discussed above (p. 124), with Dué 2002; and further Byrne 1997, Loraux 1998.
- 77 See e.g. Berman 2002, Torrance 2007, Zeitlin 2009 [1982].
- 78 For the shift in the chorus’s relationship to Eteocles and their adoption of a less deferential and more assertive and critical manner as the play proceeds, see Thalmann 1978, Winnington-Ingram 1983, Torrance 2007, Gruber 2008, with further references.
- 79 For good discussions of this ode, see Manton 1961, Burnett 1973, Thalmann 1978. In certain respects – though by a completely different technique – this choral ode accomplishes, I suggest, some of the same effect that Jean Anouilh’s chorus achieves in his cool (solo, spoken) remarks at an early point in *Antigone* (written and first performed in 1944): ‘The spring is wound up tight. It will uncoil of itself. That is what is so convenient in tragedy . . . The machine is in perfect order; it has been oiled ever since time began, and it runs without friction . . . etc.’ (tr. L. Galantière). Aeschylus uses flamboyant, imagistic song to convey this sense of deadly – yet strangely fascinating – shutting down of all possibility of escape, mixed with a curious relish for the imminent and vividly envisioned disaster, while in Anouilh this is conveyed by a sober, quasi-clinical and metatheatrical monologue. In both cases, the contemplation of impending human misery is rendered strangely enjoyable for the audience – a point to which I will return at the end.
- 80 Wilamowitz 1921:201–4, Lupaş and Petre 1981, Judet de La Combe 1998, Ieranò 1999, etc.
- 81 The alternative colometries and dovetailing technique are well discussed by Fraenkel 1954, Dale 1968:128–30, Cole 1988.
- 82 At 698–704 (in lyrics) the chorus had attempted to reassure Eteocles that ‘the Erinys will leave the house, once the gods receive a sacrifice from <your> hands’. But in that stanza they seem not yet to have grasped the nature of the ‘sacrifice’ (701 *thusian*) that will be required.
- 83 The chorus’ expressions of fear and pity for their royal family mirror and enhance the audience’s feelings, while also (we might say) aestheticizing these feelings and containing them. In Aristotle’s terms, the plot of *Seven* seems perfectly to exemplify a pattern of ‘events that occur contrary to expectation <yet> in a direct causal chain’ (*para tēn doxan di’ allēla*, *Poet.* 9. 1452a4), a pattern that he sees as the most perfect for providing the proper tragic pleasure (*oikeia hēdonē*). See further below, pp. 137–8.
- 84 As I noted, I am myself (like most Anglophone Classicists) fairly confident that we should excise *Antigone* and *Ismene* from the play completely, deleting 864–74, and assigning lines 875–1004 to the chorus, singing antiphonally. (Lines 1005–78 should also be deleted entirely.) But many scholars in Europe and elsewhere believe in the authenticity of the scenes as they are transmitted; so I will not claim certainty. In what follows, however, I will continue to employ the term ‘the chorus’ (rather than ‘*Antigone* and *Ismene*’) when referring to the singers of those lyric passages.
- 85 See the example of Aesch. *Persians*, quoted above (p. 121), and further Kranz 1933, Foley 2001. For the Spartans’ ongoing habits of lamentation for deceased kings, see, e.g., Hdt. 6.58–9; and cf. in general Holst-Warhaft 1992, Alexiou 2002, Suter 2008.
- 86 For fuller discussion of the chorus’s role in these closing scenes, see Bruit-Zaidman 1991, Gruber 2008, Visvardi 2015:170–8.
- 87 Becker 2001, Juslin and Sloboda 2001, Sacks 2008, etc. See also Meineck and Konstan 2014.

- 88 So e.g. Bertolt Brecht argued, in his promotion of a more distanced, alienating, 'epic' kind of theatre in place of reactionary 'Aristotelian' theatre. For Brecht's treatment of the Theban war, see Cairns in this volume.
- 89 See e.g. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988, Meier 1993, Seaford 1994, Hall 1997, for such an approach to Athenian tragedy, emphasizing its democratic tendencies and preoccupations, though none of these critics focuses specifically on the music (which Hall does brilliantly in Hall 1999, 2002).
- 90 See Torrance 2007 with further refs.
- 91 So, more or less, Nussbaum 1986, Segal 1996; see Wohl 2015:1–8, 39–49, 132–41.
- 92 Large-scale slaughter, expulsions (even of a whole city population), and enslavement (including rape and forcible concubinage) were commonplace and often observed. (This was not like the American population learning from news reporters and photographers for the first time about atrocities committed by US troops in Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1960s.) Although Thucydides, in his (post-Aeschylean) portrait of Athenian, Spartan, and Theban behaviour at Mytilene, Plataea, and Melos, as well as his account of stasis at Corcyra and elsewhere, goes to some lengths to show that the Peloponnesian War led to greater brutality and lower moral standards than any preceding Greek war, there is no good reason to believe or disbelieve him. We have no way of assessing the accuracy of his opinion and his account. The recently discovered corpses of 80 Athenian men, apparently some of those captured and executed (illegally, and impiously) after the failed Cylonian conspiracy of the seventh century BCE, is but one of many reminders of the routine bloodiness of Greek (and other ancient Mediterranean) war making, civil strife, and punishment of political dissidence. On all of this, see Meineck in this volume.
- 93 See e.g. Mastronarde 2010:77–9, 109, Wohl 2015:42–9.
- 94 I hasten to add: I do not myself share these views. I just want to emphasize that there is virtually no evidence of an anti-war or non-violent philosophy to be found anywhere in archaic or classical Greece, just as there is no promotion of the idea of abolishing slavery.
- 95 Anderson 1997; and cf. Virgil *Aen.* Book 2.
- 96 There have been relatively few modern productions of *Seven* that have made much impact. One is Will Power's *The Seven* (2001/2006), with extensive use of hip-hop and rap music and choreography by Bill T. Jones. See further Meineck 2006, Wetmore 2015.
- 97 Zeitlin 1996, Griffith [2005] 2015:89–103.
- 98 So Aristotle (*Poetics*, *passim*) and Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy*); and cf. Eagleton 2003 for trenchant discussion of the 'sweet violence' of tragedy as composed and consumed in its various forms over the millennia.
- 99 Roselli 2011; cf. Lech 2011.
- 100 Occasionally a chorus does end up suffering: e.g. Eur. *Tro.* But usually they emerge safe and sound from the protagonists' catastrophes, just like the audience. See further Griffith 1995, 1999:11–2, 17–19, 353–4, Hall 1997, Murnaghan 2011, Visvardi 2015.
- 101 Edmunds in this volume, 95–6, also discusses this passage.
- 102 As Halliwell 1998:323 remarks, 'The dominant modern view is that the *Poetics* is essentially formalist and, in the unfortunately narrow sense, aesthetic in its spirit'; cf. too Ford 2002.
- 103 Halliwell 1998, 2002. Aristotle mentions several different kinds of 'pleasure' (*hēdonē*) that are intrinsic to the watching of tragedy, including visual and acoustic pleasures (see e.g. Halliwell 1998, Sifakis 2001:38–49, 72–96); but the pleasures associated with emotional disturbance (pity, fear, and 'such *pathēmata*') are crucial. For Aristotle, as for an increasing number of modern philosophers and neuroscientists, 'cognition', 'emotion', and consciousness are recognized as occurring with and in the body, not simply in 'the mind/soul' or 'the brain': see e.g. Noë 2013.

- 104 *Hēdusma* in classical Greek seems primarily to be used in culinary contexts: so tragedy is a ‘spiced-up’ mode of expression/representation, unlike the blander textures and taste of for example epic or sculpture. See further Sifakis 2001:56–8.
- 105 Here and elsewhere Aristotle seems to think that the experience of performing mimetically and that of watching and listening to such performances (with varying degrees of critical sophistication) are not radically different – an opinion that is confirmed in the modern era by a number of studies of the responses of listening to music by musicians versus non-musicians.
- 106 See esp. Sifakis 2001, Halliwell 2002, Griffith 2017b.
- 107 *Poetics* 26.1462a14–17 ‘Tragedy has all the elements that epic has . . . and then also, as not a small extra factor, music and visual effects, through which <an audience’s> pleasures are most vividly produced.’
- 108 For good recent discussion, see Wohl 2015:6–8, 39–62.
- 109 The play also contains a scene in which the chorus necromantically conjure up the ghost of Darius from the Underworld.
- 110 Nettl 2005:262–3.
- 111 See e.g. Winnicott 1971 for further discussion, from a psychological ‘object relations’ perspective, of the interconnectedness between human impulses to ‘play’ (create/enjoy artistically) and to behave religiously (‘worship/believe in god’, etc.).
- 112 Composers such as J. S. Bach, G. F. Handel, and W. A. Mozart were adept at switching tunes and arrangements back and forth between secular and religious contexts. Likewise the gospel-derived sounds of Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Al Green, James Brown, and innumerable others have aroused similar responses in their audiences to those of a Pentecostal church congregation.
- 113 See Bernays 2015 [1857] for a full discussion (emphasizing the temporary nature of this quasi-cathartic process, in Aristotle’s theorizing: i.e., this is not an ‘ethical’ but an aesthetic/religious musical-mimetic affect). For further discussion of the particular affective characteristics of the Greek *auloi* (with their double-pipes and reed characteristics) played in conjunction with singing voices, and analogies with the modern Hammond B3 organ played through Leslie speakers – the instrument around which most of the accompaniment to American gospel and soul vocal music has been built – see <http://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/the-voice-of-the-pipes-and-a-third-leslie/> (with some musical clips for exemplification).
- 114 Stravinsky/Cocteau/Taymor 1992; Breuer/Telson 1983, published 1989. On these productions see e.g. McDonald 2001:159–77, Wetmore 2003, and E. Rothstein (*New York Times*, March 31, 1993) at <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9F0CE1DC173AF932A05750C0A965958260>. Both productions were well filmed and initially quite widely distributed, though they each seem currently to be unobtainable. Clips from both of them are intermittently available on YouTube.
- 115 Likewise the thunderous music that accompanies battle scenes in modern movies (discussed earlier) is aimed at heightening the audience’s feelings, not at recapturing the realities of combat.
- 116 My thanks to Isabelle Torrance and the other participants and audience members at the conference in Notre Dame, and to Mario Telò for helpful criticism and comments.

8 Fathers and sons in war

Seven against Thebes, Pythian 8, and the polemics of genre

Margaret Foster

Introduction

Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Pindar's *Pythian* 8 converge on the same mythic material and thematic concerns.¹ Both feature Amphiaraus, the warrior-seer *par excellence*, before the walls of Thebes: In the tragedy, Amphiaraus is one of the doomed Seven who have marched from Argos on behalf of Polynices to seize the Theban throne from Eteocles. In the epinician, Amphiaraus witnesses his son Alcmaeon, as leader of the Epigonoi, storm the famous seven-gated city a second time. Both texts also address the nature of familial bonds in the context of war and deploy the image of the seer on the battlefield to help articulate this theme.

Seven against Thebes formed the third tragedy of Aeschylus' so-called Theban trilogy, which also included the almost entirely lost plays *Laius* and *Oedipus*, and was first performed at the City Dionysia in 467 BCE. *Pythian* 8 is considered Pindar's last epinician and is traditionally dated to 446 BCE. The ode celebrates the Aeginetan youth Aristomenes for his victory in the wrestling contest at the Pythian games.

This chapter offers an intertextual and, more importantly, an intergeneric interpretation of these relatively contemporaneous texts and considers especially the cultural implications of their divergent treatments of the warrior-seer Amphiaraus. Its aim is not simply to set these texts side by side but rather to understand Pindar's epinician ode as a determined response to Aeschylus' earlier *Seven* and, more broadly, to his entire Theban trilogy. For, as we will see, Pindar echoes key images from the myth of Oedipus in order to rehabilitate these images and the thematic concerns they signpost by reincorporating them into an epinician ideology. This ideology centers around the stance that aristocratic excellence is reliably transferred from fathers to sons. As such, it stands in opposition to the dystopian vision of destructive familial inheritance exemplified by tragic versions of the Oedipus myth, including Aeschylus' own Theban plays.² On another level, Pindar also appears to take issue with Aeschylus' treatment of Amphiaraus as a figure devoid of his own vibrant local cultic and mythographic traditions. Recent work by Peter Wilson, Barbara Kowalzig, and Leslie Kurke has shown that Attic tragedy exhibits a propensity for uprooting gods and heroes from their epichoric cults and retrofitting their mythic pasts to meet a more suitably Athenian religious agenda.³ As I will argue here, *Pythian* 8's own presentation of Amphiaraus can be

seen as a reaction to Aeschylus' appropriation of the seer and an attempt to reconnect Amphiarus to his own oracle and to his son Alcmaeon. Ultimately, this study seeks to position both texts within what we might call a polemics of genre and to understand how Aeschylus and Pindar contribute to the ideologically charged generic economy of fifth-century choral song.

The chapter falls into two parts. Part I first considers Aeschylus' treatment of Amphiarus on the battlefield in *Seven* before turning to the ways in which Pindar in the mythic portion of *Pythian* 8 specifically responds to this characterization in his account of Amphiarus and Alcmaeon during the Epigonoï's own attack on Thebes.⁴ Part II expands this analysis to investigate how Pindar reimagines the images of the riddle and the crossroads, images from the larger myth of Oedipus that must have been included in Aeschylus' *Laius* and *Oedipus*, by again connecting them to the seer and his son and, in so doing, reincorporating them into a positive epinician worldview.

Part I: Amphiarus in *Seven against Thebes* and *Pythian* 8

Aeschylus' Amphiarus

In *Seven against Thebes*, we witness the intractable draw of an ancestral curse whose inescapability ensures that the brothers Polynices and Eteocles will meet in deadly combat. This culminating event of the tragedy continues the pattern of intra-familial violence that has tormented the family's previous members and destroyed Oedipus and Laius. An overarching theme of *Seven* is an interest in continuity between generations, but a continuity that consistently produces fatal results. The Labdacids can be reliably counted upon to wipe themselves out.

As Froma Zeitlin, among others, has shown, Aeschylus deploys the figure of Amphiarus in *Seven* to help articulate this theme of devastating generational continuity. Zeitlin demonstrates how the characterization of Amphiarus represents an amalgamation of Eteocles' and Oedipus' own salient qualities: on the one hand, Amphiarus functions as a 'mirroring model' for Eteocles and becomes the first character in the play in whom Eteocles encounters a version of himself.⁵ Most notably, as part of this correspondence, Aeschylus foregrounds Eteocles' and Amphiarus' roles as interpreters of signs and as figures who come to accept their own fates.⁶ Yet Aeschylus also aligns the seer with Oedipus, not least of all by evoking in his presentation of Amphiarus Oedipus' intimate connection to oracles, both those of Apollo as well as his own oracular curses delivered against his sons.⁷ As Zeitlin writes, 'Thus, in Eteocles' encounter with the seer, he confronts both the double of himself and that of his father.'⁸ In this way, Amphiarus triangulates between Oedipus and Eteocles, pulling father and son into closer alignment and exposing how closely Eteocles, despite his concerted efforts to the contrary, resembles Oedipus and shares his fate.

The issue of inheritance, of brothers following in the footsteps of their father, and its dysfunction and devolution into warfare, also importantly forms the catalyst for the plot of *Seven*: Eteocles' and Polynices' disagreement over sharing

Oedipus' throne has spread beyond the realm of fraternal strife and transformed into a full-scale battle between the Theban and Argive armies.⁹ Aeschylus also enlists Amphiaraus to articulate this crisis produced by Eteocles' and Polynices' incompatible claims to inheritance. In his one speech in the play, presented as a direct quotation by the messenger, Amphiaraus casts Polynices' decision to lead an Argive army against Thebes as an act that confuses the proper boundaries between his homeland and the battlefield beyond it and between native and foreign space.

Amphiaraus' attention to this collapse of spatial distinctions is registered not only in the content of his speech but also in the manner in which he addresses Polynices. As the messenger reports, Amphiaraus hurls a barrage of insults at Oedipus' son:

λέγει δὲ τοῦτ' ἔπος διὰ στόμα·
 'ἦ τοῖον ἔργον καὶ θεοῖσι προσφιλές,
 καλόν τ' ἀκοῦσαι καὶ λέγειν μεθυστέροις,
 πόλιν πατρώαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς
 πορθεῖν, στράτευμ' ἐπακτὸν ἐμβεβληκότα;
 μητρός τε πηγὴν τίς κατασβέσει δίκη,
 πατρίς τε γαῖα σῆς ὑπὸ σπουδῆς δορὶ
 ἀλοῦσα πῶς σοι ξύμμαχος γενήσεται;
 ἔγωγε μὲν δὴ τήνδε πιανῶ χθόνα,
 μάντις κεκευθὼς πολεμίας ὑπὸ χθονός.
 μαχώμεθ', οὐκ ἄτιμον ἐλπίζω μόρον.'

(Se. 579–89)

And these are the words he utters from his lips: 'Is an act like this really smiled on by the gods, is it an honorable thing for posterity to hear and tell of, to devastate one's fatherland and its native gods by bringing a foreign army to invade it? What claim of justice can quench the mother-source, and if your fatherland is conquered by the spear thanks to your incitement, how can you expect it to be your ally? For my part, I will enrich this land by becoming a prophet buried in the soil of the enemy. Let us do battle: I expect an honorable death.'

(trans. Sommerstein)

On the battlefield the seer is typically cast as one who can productively work in tandem with his *stratēgos* (military commander). *Stratēgoi* accompanied by their military seers are found from Homer to Arrian.¹⁰ The partnership of the commander and seer is not always a harmonious one, but our sources tend not to represent disputes between the pair as evidence of the seer's desire to wrest power from or claim superior status to the *stratēgos*. Rather, reports emphasize how the commander's refusal to heed the omens of the seer leads to disastrous consequences for himself and/or for the army.¹¹ As Michael Flower observes of the relationship between the seer and the *stratēgos*, 'our historical sources do not report heated confrontations'.¹² At the same time and in part because of their perceived

superabundance of divine favour, seers are frequently characterized by ancient authors as figures capable of threatening or contesting with figures who enjoy political authority.¹³ Numerous seers, both legendary and historical, upset a city's ruling elite or otherwise disrupt the current status quo. Thus we find seers implicated in uprisings and coups or otherwise depicted as fomenters of stasis. To cite one well-known example, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus' outburst against Tiresias takes the following form: ὄν δὴ σὺ πειρᾶς ἐκβαλεῖν, δοκῶν θρόνοις / παραστατήσῃν τοῖς Κρεοντείοις πέλας ('[And I am the one] whom you are attempting to cast out, thinking that you will stand close to Creon's throne,' 399–400). That is, the unsubstantiated accusation Oedipus produces in his rage is that the seer's motives stem from his desire to overthrow the king in order to increase his own political clout.¹⁴

To return to *Seven*, stripped to its essential point, Amphiarus' insult comprises a simple contrast: Polynices will never hold sway in Thebes, whereas he, Amphiarus, will enrich it. Amphiarus' foregrounding of this distinction is in keeping with the fraught and competitive power dynamics between seers and rulers. Yet a seer's competition with political authority is more likely to surface in the context of the *polis*, not in warfare. What is strange about Amphiarus' aggressive stance toward Polynices is that it takes place on the battlefield. How then to make sense of the force of the insult here? I suggest that Amphiarus' rebuke underscores the perverse nature of this particular military campaign. In Polynices' attack on his native Thebes and his attempt to wrest the throne from his own brother, internal (or fraternal) stasis has become synonymous with a foreign invasion. Amphiarus, then, registers the symbolic collapse of homeland and battlefield in the shape his abuse takes: although a military seer speaking to a commander in the context of war, Amphiarus sounds closer to a seer operating within the city in his personal attack on Polynices and his assertion of his own superior (posthumous) position in Thebes.

Thus in *Seven*, the character of Amphiarus is put to work to highlight the tragedy's central themes of the inescapable and violent familial bonds between the Labdacids and the perversion of inheritance. He triangulates between Eteocles and Oedipus and, in so doing, uncovers Eteocles' close and doomed connection to his father. His antagonism towards Polynices on the battlefield, in turn, more fittingly resembles the threatening behaviour of a seer within the *polis*, thereby underscoring how the distinctions between the city and the battlefield themselves have been blurred and confused as a result of the royal family's own distorted relationships.

But what does Aeschylus tell us about Amphiarus himself? To be sure, the tragedian bestows on the seer a striking number of exemplary attributes, qualities that both set him apart from the rest of the hubristic, deluded Seven and that help Eteocles to identify with him. Following the messenger's report, Eteocles praises the flawless nature of Amphiarus:

οὕτως δ' ὁ μάντις, νῖδ' Οἰκλέους λέγω,
σώφρων δίκαιος ἀγαθὸς εὐσεβὴς ἀνὴρ,
μέγας προφήτης, ἀνοσίοισι συμμυγεῖς

θραυστόμοισιν ἀνδράσιν βία φρενῶν,
 τείνουσι πομπὴν τὴν μακρὰν πάλιν μολεῖν,
 Διὸς θέλοντος ζυγκαθελκυσθήσεται.

(*Se.* 609–14)

So too this seer, the son of Oecles, a virtuous, upright, courageous and pious man, a great prophet, has joined together against his will with impious men of arrogant speech, who are marching one after another down a road on which it's a long journey to come back; and, Zeus willing, he will be dragged down with them.

(trans. Sommerstein)

In Aeschylus' rendering, Amphiarus is endowed with a whole series of irreproachable characteristics ('virtuous, upright, courageous, and pious') even as he is forced to associate with reckless men. Beyond the near gratuitousness of this ensemble of attributes, however, Amphiarus' qualities are striking in another way as well, although they are not typically noted as such. For this list of ideal attributes seems to appear in lieu of any specific idiosyncratic traits or details drawn from Amphiarus' own rich cultic and mythographic tradition. It is as if the traditional contours of Amphiarus' character have been, to a large degree, bleached out or, at best, are present in the form of diluted, vague allusions.

With the exception of his patronymic (609), Amphiarus is not connected to the rest of his family as he is so dependably elsewhere in both literary and visual representations, neither to his infamously treacherous wife Eriphyle nor to his sons Alcmaeon and Amphilochus nor to Melampus, the progenitor of his famous mantic clan, the Melampodidae.¹⁵ Further, instead of Adrastus, with whom other ancient sources more commonly associate him, Amphiarus most visibly interacts with Tydeus and Polynices. And while scholars typically understand Amphiarus' assertion that he will 'enrich this land by becoming a prophet buried in the soil of the enemy' (587–8) as a reference to his chthonic oracle in Thebes, the meaning of this image is ultimately left ambiguous. The rare verb the seer selects to describe his effect on the land, *πιανῶ* (literally 'I will fatten'), can be used of corpses.¹⁶ Several lines later, Amphiarus seems again to refer to his own death when he asserts that he expects a 'not dishonorable death' (*οὐκ ἄτιμον μόρον*, 589).¹⁷ That is to say, the image of the seer covered by earth and enriching the soil does not explicitly refer to the oracle of Amphiarus, although it vaguely seems to evoke it.

While Amphiarus' flawless character serves to highlight the tragedy's major themes and to generate parallels between its central figures (Eteocles, Polynices, and Oedipus), he is simultaneously detached from his own mythic history and cult and the many traditions that typically surround him. I would contend that Aeschylus' representation of Amphiarus is thus a specific instantiation of the phenomenon noted in the Introduction, that is, Attic tragedy's propensity for lifting figures from local cult and myth and appropriating them for its own ends. We might think of Aeschylus' Amphiarus, stripped of traditions that tie him especially to Thebes

and Argos, as instead an idealized, fifth-century seer, devoid of an epichoric past. Indeed, I would tentatively note that Amphiaraus in *Seven* bears a certain resemblance to two great seers of the Persian Wars, Megistias and Tisamenus.¹⁸ Like Megistias, Leonidas' seer at Thermopylae, he foresees his own doom but refuses to abandon his army (Hdt. 7.221).¹⁹ Like Tisamenus, the Greek seer at the battle of Plataea, Amphiaraus initially keeps his army from crossing a river of Thebes because the omens are not propitious (compare Hdt. 9.36 to *Se.* 378–9).

I close this discussion of Aeschylus' Amphiaraus with the image of the seer's shield. In contrast to the elaborately damning blazons carried by the rest of the *Seven*, Amphiaraus' famous shield is left blank, for, as the messenger asserts, 'he desires not the appearance of excellence but the reality' (592).²⁰ While his shield is clearly meant to signal Amphiaraus' faultless nature, we might also understand its blankness as operative on another, meta-poetic level. That is, I suggest that we also read the shield, devoid of a blazon, as a metonym for the blankness of the character of Amphiaraus himself, a character detached from his epichoric traditions. With the image of Aeschylus' shield in mind, let us now turn to Pindar's quite different rendering of the seer in *Pythian* 8.

Pindar's Amphiaraus

The central triad of *Pythian* 8 contains the ode's mythic portion and so-called coda, the point at which Pindar leaves the past and returns to the present day. This triad forms the relevant intertext to *Seven*:

αὔξων δὲ πάτραν Μειδυλιδᾶν λόγον φέρεις,
 τὸν ὄνπερ ποτ' Ὀϊκλέος παῖς ἐν ἑπτατύλοις ἰδὼν
 υἱοῦς Θήβαις αἰνίζατο παρμένοντας αἰχμᾶ,
 ὅπότε' ἀπ' Ἄργεος ἤλυθον
 δευτέραν ὁδὸν Ἐπίγονοι.
 ὧδ' εἶπε μαρναμένων·
 'φυᾶ τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει
 ἐκ πατέρων παισὶ λῆμα. θαέομαι σαφές
 δράκοντα ποικίλον αἰθᾶς Ἀλκμᾶν' ἐπ' ἀσπίδος
 νομῶντα πρῶτον ἐν Κάδμου τύλαις.
 ὁ δὲ καμὼν προτέρᾳ πάθῃ
 νῦν ἀρείονος ἐνέχεται
 ὄρνιχος ἀγγελία
 Ἄδραστος ἥρως· τὸ δὲ οἴκοθεν
 ἀντία πράξει. μόνος γὰρ ἐκ Δαναῶν στρατοῦ
 θανόντος ὅστέα λέξαις υἱοῦ, τύχῃ θεῶν
 ἀφίξεται λαῶ σὺν ἀβλαβεῖ
 Ἄβαντος εὐρυχόρους ἀγνιάς.' τοιαῦτα μὲν
 ἐφθέγγετ' Ἀμφιάρηος. χαίρων δὲ καὶ αὐτός
 Ἀλκμᾶνα στεφάνοισι βάλλω, ραίνω δὲ καὶ ὕμνω,
 γεῖτων ὅτι μοι καὶ κτεάνων φύλαξ ἐμῶν

ὕπαντασεν ἰόντι γᾶς ὀμφαλὸν παρ' αἰίδιμον,
μαντευμάτων τ' ἐφάψατο συγγόνιοις τέχναις.

(P. 8.38–60)

...but exalting the clan of the Meidylidae, you [the victor Aristomenes] bear the word, the very one which once the son of Oecles riddled when he saw at seven-gated Thebes the sons standing fast in battle, when they came from Argos on a second road, the Epigonoι. Thus he spoke as they were fighting: 'By nature noble determination from fathers is conspicuous in sons. I behold him clearly, Alcmaeon, wielding the dappled snake on his fiery shield, first at the gates of Thebes. But the other, who suffered in a previous misfortune, now is possessed of a message of a better omen, Adrastus the hero. But at home he will fare the opposite. For he alone from the army of Danaans, having collected the bones of his dead son, will arrive through the fortune of the gods with his army unharmed at the wide streets of Abas.' Such things Amphiarus uttered. And I myself also rejoicing pelt Alcmaeon with crowns, and I also sprinkle him with a hymn, because as my neighbour and the guardian of my possessions he met me going to the renowned navel of the earth and he grasped hold of prophecies with his inborn skills.

Amphiarus beholds his son Alcmaeon leading the rest of the Epigonoι against Thebes. The seer also prophesies that Adrastus will return to Argos victorious in the battle of the Epigonoι but will suffer the death of his own son, Aegialeus. In the coda, Pindar then connects mythic past to epinician present through the remarkable assertion that he himself once encountered Alcmaeon on the road to Delphi and that he received a prophecy from him. In Part II, I will discuss in greater detail the introductory sentence of the mythic portion as well as the concluding coda. Setting aside these outer frames for now, I attend to the mythic portion's two main scenes: Amphiarus' watching Alcmaeon as he wields his shield in battle and Adrastus' returning home to Argos with the bones of Aegialeus.

In *Pythian* 8, Pindar responds directly to the role Amphiarus performs in *Seven* as well as to his characterization there as a figure detached from his own epichoric cult and mythology. As discussed earlier, Aeschylus enlists the seer to connect Eteocles to Oedipus and thereby to underscore the son's unavoidable inheritance of his father's fate. For Pindar, by contrast, Amphiarus' relationship with his own son, Alcmaeon, serves as a paradigmatic example of the continuity of aristocratic excellence between generations, of the way in which a father's exceptional abilities are passed down to his son. At the same time, Pindar reattaches Amphiarus to his own family and mantic clan as well as to his own local oracular cult. The image of the hero Alcmaeon carrying a shield emblazoned with a snake crystallizes this ideological stance and the restoration of Amphiarus' idiosyncratic identity. What is more, it does so by coopting and reworking a key image from Aeschylus' *Seven*.

In a tradition that extends back to the *Thebaid*, Amphiarus is known not only for his seercraft but also for his status as a warrior: in *Olympian* 6, for instance, Adrastus praises Amphiarus as 'both a good seer and good at fighting with the

spear' (ἀμφοτέρων μάντιν τ' ἀγαθὸν καὶ / δουρὶ μάρνασθαι, 17).²¹ Alcmaeon's own shield, then, can be understood as symbolizing the hero's assumption of his father's military prowess, while the image of the snake upon it highlights his inherited mantic abilities.²² Most scholars interpret the snake blazon as signalling seercraft. The Greeks connected snakes to divination in general and, more particularly, to the Melampodidae, the clan of seers to which Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon belong.²³ The image of the snake also elicits a chthonic resonance, and this convergence of mantic-chthonic associations embodied in the snake fittingly captures Amphiaraus' chthonic oracle.²⁴ At the same time, the blazon clearly recalls the famous blazons of *Seven*. As Gregory Nagy has shown, images of snakes and dragons in *Seven* are all negative, including the *drakōn* (dragon/serpent) on the shield of Hippomedon (*Se.* 503), which Alcmaeon's positive blazon of the snake now counters.²⁵ Further, if we again interpret the shields from a meta-poetic perspective, we might say that whereas Amphiaraus' blank shield in *Seven* indicates his detachment from his own traditions and history, in *Pythian* 8, Amphiaraus, via his son's blazon, is reattached to his mantic clan and chthonic oracle.

Amphiaraus' local Theban oracle, the so-called Amphiareion, is also evoked at an earlier moment in the mythic portion.²⁶ For Amphiaraus' description of his son brings with it a startling realization: Amphiaraus must be speaking from beyond the grave, since the scene he beholds takes place after he has been swallowed by the earth and transformed into an oracle.²⁷ In contrast to Amphiaraus' vague acknowledgement of his future oracular status in *Seven* ('I will enrich this land by becoming a prophet buried in the soil of the enemy,' [587–8]), here Amphiaraus is shown in the process of prophesying from this very oracle.

Finally, as discussed earlier, the seer's attack on Polynices in *Seven* emphasizes how Eteocles and Polynices' dispute over inheritance has erupted into a war that blurs the boundaries between city and battlefield. Conversely, in *Pythian* 8, Amphiaraus' speech asserts a clear division between these same spaces. This spatial demarcation is one effect of the juxtaposition between the father–son pairings of Amphiaraus–Alcmaeon and Adrastus–Aegialeus in the mythic portion. Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon are the father–son pair of the battlefield, while Pindar locates Adrastus and Aegialeus within the city of Argos. In contrast to his speech in *Seven*, Amphiaraus' pronouncements in *Pythian* 8 rectify not only dysfunctional father–son relationships but also the corollary murkiness of spatial boundaries that they generate.²⁸

In this section, I have attempted to show that, in the mythic portion of *Pythian* 8, Pindar directly responds to both the subject matter and agenda of Aeschylus' *Seven* by rehabilitating the relationships between fathers and sons in the myth of the Seven and Epigonoι and by restoring Amphiaraus' traditional cultic and mythic identity.²⁹ This response is encapsulated, above all, in the image of Alcmaeon's snake-emblazoned shield. In his targeted response to Aeschylus' tragedy, Pindar's approach is equally ideological and, in fact, perhaps even more radical. For by using Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon as the ultimate instance of the generational continuity of excellence and abilities, Pindar departs from the mainstream tradition concerning Alcmaeon. As I have discussed elsewhere, the

dominant narrative of Alcmaeon repeatedly seeks to detach the hero from any mantic connection to his father.³⁰ That Pindar does form this connection here, then, strikingly drives home the poet's point by making a powerful assertion: not even Alcmaeon, Pindar seems to be saying, can be denied the mantic inheritance that is properly owed to him from his father.

Turning now to Part II, I will expand the analysis of Pindar's intertextual and intergeneric response to Aeschylus and argue that *Pythian* 8 seems to oppose the ideological poetics not only of *Seven* but also of Aeschylus' entire Theban trilogy and, more broadly still, of the genre of tragedy itself. I will focus on two key images of the Oedipus myth that also appear in *Pythian* 8, those of the riddle and the road. As I will argue, Pindar evokes these images in order to recuperate and so reinstate them into epinician's positive valuation of the ties between fathers and sons, a valuation that stands in opposition to Attic tragedy's emphasis on dysfunctional familial bonds.

Part II: riddles and roads

Amphiaraus' riddle

No sooner is Amphiaraus introduced in the myth of *Pythian* 8 than he is accorded a curious verb, αἰνίξατο (40). αἰνίσσομαι ('to speak in riddles') appears only here in the extant Pindaric corpus. Its presence in the passage is confounding because the *hapax* introduces a pronouncement that does not contain a riddle, an observation that has troubled scholars since the time of the scholiasts.³¹ One proposed solution is to understand the verb in this context as connoting simply 'prophecy' since prophesying in general can be oblique and riddling. If the verb is to be translated as 'prophecy,' however, a further difficulty arises insofar as only the latter part of Amphiaraus' speech, in which he describes the fate of Adrastus and his son (48–55), is, technically speaking, prophetic. The initial portion (44–7) comprises a *gnōmē* concerning the nature of inheritance followed by Amphiaraus 'clearly beholding' Alcmaeon standing before the gates of Thebes. We must attempt to understand the strange presence of the verb in this particular context where it does not seem to signal a riddle or even, initially, a prophecy.

The verb αἰνίσσομαι in its earliest extant appearances is primarily connected to the genre of tragedy.³² So too is the verb's more common cognate noun, αἴννγμα. With the exception of a fragment of Pindar, mentioned below, the word is first found in the tragedies of Aeschylus (four times), Sophocles (twice), and Euripides (twelve times).³³ That the tragedians make relatively frequent reference to riddles is perhaps not surprising given their genre's affinity for contending with paradoxes and opacity. But in addition to the genre's larger application of the term, αἴννγμα, of course, also repeatedly and more particularly signifies tragedy's most notorious riddle, τὸ τῆς Σφίγγος αἴννγμα 'the riddle of the Sphinx'. In fact, a tantalizing fragment of unknown genre from Pindar provides

us with one of the earliest references to this connection: αἰνίγμα παρθένου· ἐξ ἀγριαῶν γνάθων ('the riddle from the fierce jaws of the maiden,' fr. 177(d)).

In a far better preserved context, Jocasta refers to the riddle as well as the famous myth to which it belongs in the prologue of *Phoenician Women*:

ὥς δ' ἐπεζάρει
 Σφιγξ ἄρπαγαῖσι πόλιν ἐμός τ' οὐκ ἦν πόσις,
 Κρέων ἀδελφὸς τὰμὰ κηρύσσει λέχη,
 ὅστις σοφῆς αἰνίγμα παρθένου μάθοι,
 τούτῳ ξυνάψειν λέκτρα. τυγχάνει δέ πως
 μούσας ἐμός παῖς Οἰδίπους Σφιγγὸς μαθὼν
 [ὅθεν τύραννος τῆσδε γῆς καθίσταται]
 καὶ σκῆπτρ' ἔπαθλα τῆσδε λαμβάνει χθονός

(Eur. *Pho.* 45–52)

Now when the Sphinx was oppressing and ravaging our city, after my husband's death, my brother Creon proclaimed my marriage: that he would marry me to anyone who should guess the riddle of the crafty maiden. It happened somehow that my son, Oedipus, guessed the Sphinx's song; [and so he became king of this land] and received the scepter of this land as his prize.

(trans. Coleridge)

As this passage makes clear, the riddle appears to be as inseparably linked to Oedipus as to the Sphinx herself. Consequently, we can also think of the riddle as a succinct means of referencing Oedipus' own distinctive character. In the closing verses of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for instance, the chorus offers the following concise summation: ὃ πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι, λεύσσειτ', Οἰδίπους ὅδε, /ὃς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἤδει καὶ κράτιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ ('Residents of our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the renowned riddle, and was a most mighty man,' 1524–5 [trans. Jebb]). Oedipus himself closely echoes this assessment when he laments in *Phoenician Women*:

ὃ πάτρας κλεινῆς πολῖται, λεύσσειτ'· Οἰδίπους ὅδε,
 ὃς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἔγνω καὶ μέγιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ,
 ὃς μόνος Σφιγγὸς κατέσχον τῆς μαιφόνου κράτη,
 νῦν ἄτιμος αὐτὸς οἰκτρὸς ἐξελαύνομαι χθονός.

(Eur. *Pho.* 1758–61)

O citizens of a famous country, look at me; I am Oedipus, who solved the famous riddle, and was the greatest of men, I, who alone controlled the murderous Sphinx's power, am now myself driven from the land in dishonor and misery.

(trans. Coleridge)

Finally, we might note in this context the exchange found in a fragment of a comedy by Epicharmus, a contemporary of Aeschylus:

- (A.) τί δὲ τόδ' ἐστί;
 (B.) δηλαδὴ τρίπους.
 (A.) τί
 μὲν ἔχει πόδας
 τέτορας; οὐκ ἐστὶν τρίπους, ἀλλ' <ἐστὶν> οἶμαι
 τετράπους.
 (B.) ἔστι δ' ὄνουμ' αὐτῷ τρίπους, τέτοράς γα μὲν
 ἔχει πόδας.
 (A.) εἰ δίπους τοίνυν ποκ' ἦς, αἰνίγματ'
 Οἰ<δίπου> νοεῖς.

(Epicharm. fr. 147)

- (A.) What's this?
 (B.) A tripod, obviously.
 (A.) Then
 why does it have
 four feet? It's not a tripod; I'd say it's a tetrapod!
 (B.) It's called a tripod; but it's got four feet.
 (A.) If it ever had two feet, you're thinking of
 Oedipus' riddle!

(trans. Olson)

In this fragment from Epicharmus, the riddle is so closely identified with Oedipus himself that it can be called 'Oedipus' riddle.'³⁴

We will return to the discussion of αἰνίσσομαι/αἰνίγμα in the Conclusion. For now, I note that the verb and especially its cognate noun exhibit a pronounced association with the genre of tragedy in their earliest fifth-century appearances. Further, in the case of *ainigma*, the term is tied not only more generally to the Sphinx's riddle and so to the larger Oedipus story (a connection that Pindar himself makes in fragment 177(d)) but can even directly signpost the distinctive character of Oedipus. In light of these observations, then, I would like to suggest that the striking presence of this Pindaric *hapax* in *Pythian* 8 is meant to evoke the famous riddle of the Sphinx and the riddle's strong associations with Oedipus. I will develop this suggestion further in what follows but, before doing so, let us turn to another productive image to which αἰνίσσομαι is connected in *Pythian* 8, namely, that of the road.

A second road and the road to Delphi

The image of the road in *Pythian* 8 also vividly conjures the Oedipus myth and does so in order to counter tragedy's most famous road with an epinician alternative. Tragedy's famous road is, of course, the *triodos*, the crossroads that

mark the site of Oedipus' deadly confrontation with his father Laius.³⁵ The crossroads seems to have been a conspicuous and expected dramatic moment within the frequent tragic performances of the Oedipus myth throughout the fifth century.³⁶ A fragment attributed to Aeschylus' Theban trilogy envisions the critical location at Potniae, on the outskirts of Thebes:

ἐπῆμεν τῆς ὁδοῦ τροχίλατον
σχιστῆς κελεύθου τρίοδον, ἔνθα ζυμβολὰς
τριῶν κελεύθων Ποτνιαῖδας ἡμείβομεν.

(Aesch. fr. 173 N² = fr. 387a Radt)

On our journey we were approaching the junction of three wagon-tracks where the road forks, where we were passing the meeting of the three ways at Potniae.

(trans. Sommerstein)

Aeschylus' over-determined representation of the site includes a pile-up of four different words for roads as well as descriptions of the crossroads both as the 'convergence of three roads' (ζυμβολὰς τριῶν κελεύθων) and as a 'split road' (σχιστῆς κελεύθου). The redundancy of terms crammed into this passage seems in part to be a way of calling attention to the site's significance within the tragedy.³⁷ Yet Kurke argues that, beyond its prominent and inevitable recounting by tragedians, the crossroads came to emblemize the genre of tragedy *tout court* by the mid-fifth century. In this way, it functioned as a specific instantiation of how the Oedipus myth as a whole became a symbol of the genre.³⁸ What allowed for the crossroads to become paradigmatically significant seems to be not only its important role as the location of the first of Oedipus' impious acts but also the way in which the image of the *triodos* perfectly corresponded to the structural and visual arrangement of the tragic stage. For, following Oliver Taplin, we might understand the Theater of Dionysus as itself a convergence of three roads or entrances (*eisodoi*) into the orchestra.³⁹ Further, as George Steiner once noted, the 'convergence of three roads' can be seen as a metaphor well suited to tragedy's overall interest in confounding ambiguity:

Whereas Hercules' choice between *two* roads is characteristic of the binary typology of choices between virtue and vice, light and dark, life and death, etc., a *triadic* configuration, as we find it in the Oidipous myths and on the Greek stage, points to what is structurally, topologically, and existentially *undecidable*. It almost defines the recursively ambiguous, perplexing and formally indefinite ending of certain great tragic conflicts and their representations.⁴⁰

A capacity to evoke Oedipus as well as the genre of tragedy more generally, then, inheres in the image of the crossroads. Tragedians are not the only poets to recognize and leverage the dynamic association between the crossroads and

tragedy. Thus, for instance, Kurke contends that it is precisely this connection that Pindar exploits in *Pythian* 11. In that ode, Pindar contests the ideology and poetics of Attic tragedy, as manifest above all in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, by contrasting it with the ideology and poetics of epinician.⁴¹ One of Pindar's tactics in doing so is to contrast the potent image of the 'path-shifting crossroads' (ἀμενσιπόρους τριόδους, *P.* 11.38) with that of the 'straight road' (ὁρθὰν κέλευθον, *P.* 11.39). As Kurke concludes of this charged contrast: '[W]e might say Pindar maps out a generic topography, in which epinikion represents the 'straight road' of praise, while tragedy is figured by the unstable and terrifying landscape of the 'path-shifting crossroads.'⁴²

Returning to *Pythian* 8, I will argue that here too Pindar deploys the image of the road to refute or countermand the crossroads of Oedipus and, in this way, to remedy the tragic evocations that the crossroads embody. Pindar responds to the crossroads of Oedipus with two separate references to roads in *Pythian* 8. The image of the road first appears in the same opening sentence of the mythic portion as Amphiarus' riddling utterance. The two images, the riddle and the road, are thus semantically and aurally joined to each other and, at the same time, are both given prominence by their inclusion in the introduction of the ode's central myth. To recall the relevant passage:

τὸν ὄνπερ ποτ' Ὀϊκλῆος παῖς ἐν ἑπταπύλοις ἰδὼν
 υἱοῦς Θήβαις αἰνίζατο παρμένοντας αἰχμᾶ,
 ὅπῳτ' ἀπ' Ἀργεὸς ἦλυθον
 δευτέραν ὁδὸν Ἐπίγονοι.

(*P.* 8.39–42)

but exalting the clan of the Meidylidae, you bear the word, the very one which once the son of Oecles prophetically riddled when he saw at seven-gated Thebes the sons standing fast in battle, when they came from Argos on a second road, the Epigonoι.

I simply note the collocation of the road and Amphiarus' riddle here and will address their pairing at the end of this section. For now, I wish to focus on how the 'second road' contributes to the mythic portion and coda's overarching theme of the positive relationship between fathers and sons and how that theme offers a response to the dysfunctional and violent relationship between fathers and sons manifest in the Oedipus myth, including in Aeschylus' Theban trilogy.

As discussed in Part I, the primary way in which this positive bond between fathers and sons is articulated in *Pythian* 8's mythic portion and coda is through Alcmaeon's inheritance of Amphiarus' renowned military and mantic traits. Here I will attend more closely to several ways in which Pindar emphasizes this transference of traits by assimilating Amphiarus and Alcmaeon themselves at certain moments in the myth and coda. One such moment of fusion occurs in these opening lines of the myth, quoted above, in which Pindar seems to be recounting the Seven's original march against Thebes and not that of the

Epigonoι. Indeed, nothing in the mythic portion's first three lines signals that we are not in the time of the Seven. Amphiarau's prophesying before the walls of seven-gated Thebes belongs far more readily to the first campaign.⁴³ Even the reference to sons (υἱοῦς, 40) does not necessarily put us in mind of the Epigonoι: the Seven themselves could easily be characterized in this way, given Pindar's frequent periphrastic tendency to identify victors and mythical heroes as the sons of their fathers.⁴⁴ The preceding description of Amphiarau as the child of Oecles perhaps encourages this understanding of υἱοῦς here. The third line of the myth, ὁπότ' ἀπ' Ἄργεος ἤλυθον ('when they came from Argos'), also easily continues the impression that Pindar is recounting the Seven's own expedition. It is only when Pindar reveals that the men arriving from Argos came 'on a second road' as 'the Epigonoι' (δευτέραν ὁδὸν Ἐπίγονοι) that we must double back and re-envision the scene as one belonging to the Epigonoι and not to the Seven. The postponed position of δευτέραν ὁδὸν Ἐπίγονοι, and especially Ἐπίγονοι as the final word, captures perfectly the delayed or repetitive nature of the Epigonoι themselves. Moreover, this recalibration also forces us to realize that, as noted in Part I, Amphiarau must be witnessing these events as an apotheosized, oracular hero. I would argue that one effect of this surprise ending is to experience both campaigns synchronically and, in so doing, to acknowledge the seamless transfiguration of fathers into sons that is itself the central theme of the ode's mythic portion and coda. This experience is then explicitly confirmed by Amphiarau's gnomic pronouncement that immediately follows: ὃδ' εἶπε μαρναμένων / φυᾷ τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει / ἐκ πατέρων παισὶ λῆμα. ('Thus he spoke while they [the Epigonoι] were fighting: By nature noble determination from fathers is conspicuous in sons,' 43–5.)⁴⁵ Thus the opening sequence of the mythic portion is saturated with generational repetition, and the image of the 'second road' contributes to this theme by underscoring the identical course that Amphiarau and Alcmaeon take to Thebes.

I wish to pause here to compare this reading of *Pythian* 8's 'second road' with tragedy's paradigmatic crossroads. That we are justified in making this comparison will become clearer once we turn to the coda's own road imagery as well as once we consider, in the Conclusion, both of these roads in relation to Amphiarau's riddling utterance. But at this point it is worth briefly parsing the different implications between the Epigonoι's second road and the crossroads of Oedipus.

Pythian 8's 'second road' operates as the spatial and temporal inverse of Oedipus' encounter with Laius. Whereas Oedipus finds himself facing opposite his father, who has arrived at the same intersection at precisely the same moment in time, Alcmaeon, at a later point in time, retraces the exact course of his father Amphiarau by travelling the same road in the same direction. The paths of Oedipus and Laius are simultaneous from a temporal standpoint but spatially opposed as father and son travel along different routes. Conversely, Amphiarau and Alcmaeon are temporally staggered but, from a spatial perspective, trace identical paths on their way to Thebes. These spatial-temporal distinctions between the two father-and-son pairs accompany diametrically opposed outcomes: the first encounter ends in the son's killing the father, whereas the second scenario emphasizes

the son's expedition to avenge his father and the father's sanctioning of his son's actions. The fragmented nature of the 'split' road that leads to Oedipus' impious crime contrasts with the intactness of *Pythian* 8's 'second road'. At the same time, notwithstanding their different configurations and different outcomes, a correspondence obtains between them insofar as both roads are used to visualize the relationship between fathers and sons.

With this comparison in mind, let us now turn to the myth's coda. The implicit contrast between Oedipus' crossroads and Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon's second road is more overtly developed in this culminating scene as *Pythian* 8 leaves the mythic past of the Epigoni:

ἐφθέγξατ' Ἀμφιάροιο, χαίρων δὲ καὶ αὐτός
 Ἀλκμᾶνα στεφάνοισι βάλλω, ραίνω δὲ καὶ ὕμνῳ,
 γείτων ὅτι μοι καὶ κτεάνων φύλαξ ἐμῶν
 ὑπάντασεν ἰόντι γᾶς ὀμφαλὸν παρ' Ἀοίδιμον,
 μαντευμάτων τ' ἐφάψατο συγγόνιοις τέχναις.

(P. 8.56–60)

Such things Amphiaraus uttered. And I myself also rejoicing pelt Alcmaeon with crowns, and I also sprinkle him with a hymn, because as my neighbour and the guardian of my possessions he met me going to the renowned navel of the earth and he grasped hold of prophecies with his inborn skills.

These lines have produced vigorous scholarly disagreement over who prophesies to whom on the road to Delphi and, furthermore, what form the appearance of the prophesying figure takes.⁴⁶ Before turning to the passage's significance, therefore, I must summarize briefly the most compelling solutions to the identities of the participants in this striking exchange en route to Delphi. First, as many scholars recognize, the identity of the speaking subject, or *ego*, is most likely the poet himself and not, as others have suggested, the chorus or even the victor.⁴⁷ Second, the poet experiences an epiphany of the dead hero Alcmaeon, who delivers a prophecy to him and to whom Pindar gives cult.⁴⁸

These attributions (that is, that the *ego* represents Pindar and that the epiphany belongs to Alcmaeon) best fit the passage's syntax and internal logic, as well as the poem's cultural context.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that we can be fairly confident that these attributions are correct, however, it is hard to overestimate the extraordinary nature of this encounter. For Pindar here, alone among our archaic and classical sources, asserts that Alcmaeon, like his father, appears as an oracle. While there is a relatively abundant amount of evidence linking Amphiaraus to a local Theban oracular site, the Amphiareion, there is no such comparable association for Alcmaeon. As discussed earlier, Alcmaeon, wielding his snake-emblazoned shield before the gates of Thebes, is uniquely characterized as embodying his father's double role as a warrior-seer. Now in the coda, again seemingly without precedent, Alcmaeon inherits Amphiaraus' most striking attribute when he displays his own ability to deliver oracular utterances. At the same time, this assertion, however astounding,

is in keeping with the mythic portion and coda's interest in the inevitability of inherited aristocratic excellence and in Alcmaeon as the paradigm of that model. The coda's concluding phrase, in which Alcmaeon's prophecy is explicitly said to derive from his συγγόνιοι τέχναις ('inborn skills,' 60), delivers a final affirmation of this ideological stance.

During this climatic scene, Pindar also characterizes Alcmaeon as γείτων. . . μοι καὶ κτεάνων φύλαξ ἐμῶν ('my neighbor and the guardian of my possessions', 58). This description has produced much scholarly consternation.⁵⁰ The term *geiton* (neighbour) indicates a local hero, an image supported both by the accompanying attribution of Alcmaeon as the guardian of Pindar's personal property and by the poet's own actions in this scene, since crowning and sprinkling draw from the vocabulary of hero cult ('I myself also rejoicing pelt Alcmaeon with crowns, and I also sprinkle him with a hymn,' 56–7).⁵¹ But I would contend that these attributes and actions ('neighbour', 'guardian of my possessions', and Pindar's cultic gestures) all of which suggest a degree of physical contact and materiality, produce a vision of an actual sanctuary.⁵² In the absence of a known sanctuary to Alcmaeon and given the pronounced correspondence that the myth and coda establish between Amphiaraus and his son, the coda at this moment seems to associate Alcmaeon's own epiphany with the sanctuary of the Amphiareion.⁵³

The possible evocation of the Amphiareion is supported by compelling evidence that the sanctuary was actually located in the vicinity of Pindar's purported encounter with Alcmaeon. While some modern scholars argue that the oracle of Amphiaraus was only ever situated at the site of Oropos, in the border region between Attica and Boeotia, our ancient sources indicate that an earlier Amphiareion existed close to Thebes.⁵⁴ What is more, Pausanias (9.8.3) places the Amphiareion on the road between Thebes and Potniae, along a possible route to take for traveling to Delphi, just as Pindar himself claims to be doing when he meets with Alcmaeon.

Taken together, Pindar's encounter with Alcmaeon on the road from Thebes to Delphi and the coda's evocation of the Amphiareion, plausibly located near Potniae, work to produce a compelling counterpart to the crossroads of Oedipus. We can perhaps be even more precise in our comparison: Pindar's description of this meeting seems to operate as a response to the specific account of the crossroads found in Aeschylus' Theban trilogy, quoted earlier (fr. 387a Radt). For Aeschylus' choice of location at Potniae, which places the confrontation between Oedipus and Laius only about a mile from Thebes, is strange and seemingly without parallel in other versions of the Oedipus myth.⁵⁵ In other versions, the crossroads is located in more remote mountainous regions of Boeotia or, as in Sophocles' account, in Phocis. Indeed, the very strangeness of the Potniae location is what prompts a scholiast to *Oedipus Tyrannus* to comment on and thereby preserve the Aeschylus fragment in the first place.⁵⁶

Potniae receives its name from a cult of Demeter and Persephone (the 'Potniae' or 'Mistresses') that resided there. Kurke persuasively suggests that Aeschylus' unusual placement of the crossroads at Potniae was seen as a 'profanation' of the Boeotian site that celebrated Demeter and Persephone, and the inseparable

parent–child bond the pair represent, a profanation because Aeschylus caused the site to become associated with the most impious act a child could commit against a parent.⁵⁷ As such, Aeschylus’ placement of Oedipus’ crossroads at Potniae and the resulting desecration that the association of an infamous parricide implicitly brought to the local Boeotian cult site participated, as a perhaps especially aggressive example, in the larger phenomenon of ‘cult skirmishing’ taking place between Athens and Boeotia in the sixth and fifth centuries.⁵⁸

If Aeschylus’ choice of location for the crossroads purposefully violated a Theban cult site that celebrated a parent–child connection, then we might understand the encounter envisioned in *Pythian* 8 as a direct generic and cultic response to the tragedian’s own manoeuvre. For it is Alcmaeon’s close connection to his father, manifest in his ‘inherited skills’, that allows him to appear in an epiphany and deliver an oracle to Pindar. And if, as I suggested previously, the Amphiareion (which Pausanias locates near Potniae) is also conjured in the coda, Pindar’s encounter with Alcmaeon takes place not just on the road to Delphi but more precisely in the vicinity of Potniae. That is to say, Pindar’s own counter-manoeuve appears to rehabilitate directly Aeschylus’ profanation of that Boeotian site.

Pindar’s deliberate evocation of the crossroads is suggested by a final component of *Pythian* 8’s coda. The verb that Pindar uses to describe his encounter with Alcmaeon is ὑπαντάω (‘to meet’), a *hapax* within his extant corpus. Yet it is worth noting that Pindar does deploy the nearly identical verb συνάντομαι in *Olympian* 2:

οὕτω δὲ Μοῖρ’, ἃ τε πατρώιον
τῶνδ’ ἔχει τὸν εὐφρονα πότμον, θεόρτῳ σὺν ὄλβῳ
ἐπὶ τι καὶ πῆμ’ ἄγει παλιντράπελον ἄλλῳ χρόνῳ·
ἐξ οὗπερ ἔκτεινε Λᾷον μόριμος υἱός
συναντόμενος, ἐν δὲ Πυθῶνι χρησθέν
παλαίφατον τέλεσσεν.

(*O.* 2.35–40)

Thus it is that Fate, who controls the kindly destiny that is the patrimony of this family, adds to their heaven-sent happiness some misery as well, to be reversed at another time – from that day when his fated son met and killed Laius and fulfilled the oracle declared long before at Pytho.

(trans. Race)

In *Olympian* 2, the recollection of Oedipus’ encounter with Laius serves to mitigate the ode’s assertion of continuous prosperity for the family of Theron, the ode’s *laudandus*, who claimed descent from Polynices’ son, Thersander. Here I simply observe that Pindar uses for his own meeting with Alcmaeon along the road to Delphi a rare verb that shares its uncompounded form with the verb he deploys in *Olympian* 2 to describe Oedipus’ encounter with his father in a similar location.⁵⁹

Like the mythic portion’s ‘second road’ of the Epigonoι, Pindar’s meeting with Alcmaeon evokes the crossroads of Oedipus. This evocation appears to be more explicit since Pindar, by claiming that the meeting occurs as he travels from

Thebes to Delphi, conjures the same route that precipitated Oedipus' encounter with his father and, more precisely still, the location at Potniae found in the fragment from Aeschylus' Theban trilogy. But instead of pitting father and son against each other in this meeting, Pindar reworks the dynamics of the scene so that he himself encounters a son who appears closely connected to, almost in the guise of, his father Amphiaraus. In so doing, Pindar restores the father–son bond that is destroyed by Oedipus and Laius. At the same time as Pindar sets up this opposition, he also preserves a significant point of contact between the pairings of Alcmaeon/Amphiaraus and Oedipus/Laius: for the pairs do correspond to one another insofar as both are interested in the nature of inheritance and familial continuity. Oedipus' encounter with Laius is in fact a crucial event in Oedipus' ability to assume the throne at Thebes, the very throne to which he is legitimately heir. Thus both texts use the encounter on the road between Thebes and Delphi to articulate a son's inheritance of his father's role (whether that role be as king of Thebes or as an oracle). But this similarity exposes the ideological differences between the two genres: whereas the tragic scenario imagines that in order to inherit, the son must violently kill his father, the epinician version imagines a seamless transfiguration of father into son.

Finally, I return to Amphiaraus' riddling utterance (αἰνίξατο, 40), a word with a marked tragic resonance, in order to connect it to the road imagery I have explored in this section. As noted, Amphiaraus' riddle and the Epigonoi's 'second road' both appear in the mythic portion's introductory sentence and, as a result, are semantically and aurally joined. These two closely joined terms evoke the key images that embody Oedipus' two major transgressions: the road signifies his parricide and the riddle signifies its 'reward', Oedipus' marriage to his own mother. The combination of these two terms in *Pythian* 8, then, works together to call to mind the Oedipus myth. What is more, Aeschylus himself produces the same pairing of paradigmatic images in *Agamemnon* by having the chorus of Argive elders allude to both the crossroads and riddle in their *parodos*.⁶⁰ As Kurke has argued, the chorus does so, on a meta-theatrical level, in order to 'establish and ground their tragic authority by the conjuration of Oidipous'.⁶¹ In *Pythian* 8, then, Pindar opens his mythic portion with a pair of images redolent of tragedy's paradigmatic myth, images which Aeschylus himself uses to authorize *Agamemnon*'s chorus' statement as one belonging to the tragic genre. But Pindar evokes the riddle and the road in order to reassign these terms to Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon, boldly reconfiguring them to authorize instead his own epinician outlook.

Conclusion

The mythic portion and coda of *Pythian* 8 comprise a densely wrought and compressed narrative that evokes in miniature and reverse order certain elements of the myths of Oedipus and the Seven, beginning with the Epigonoi and ending with an encounter on the road to Delphi. In the process, Pindar closely reworks the figure of the warrior-seer Amphiaraus as well as certain paradigmatic images and their implications from *Seven against Thebes* and the crossroads fragment of Aeschylus'

Theban trilogy (fr. 387a Radt). In Part I, I demonstrated that while Aeschylus recruits Amphiarus to underscore the corrupt intra-familial ties among Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polynices and the devolution of these ties into full-blown warfare, Pindar highlights the positive relationship between Amphiarus and Alcmaeon on the battlefield and reattaches the seer to his epichoric Theban oracle and mantic clan. He does so in part by countering Amphiarus' blank shield in *Seven* with Alcmaeon's blazon of the snake. In Part II, I argued that Pindar also overhauls the images of the riddle and, especially, the road by separating them from their associations with tragedy and employing them to represent the generational continuity of exemplary mantic ability and military prowess.

I will close with one final suggestion concerning Amphiarus' riddling utterance in *Pythian* 8. As seen above, the verb introduces a gnomic statement: *φυῶ τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει / ἐκ πατέρων παισὶ λῆμα* ('By nature noble determination from fathers is conspicuous in sons', 44–5). Nagy has shown that this *gnōmē*, delivered by the dead Amphiarus as he beholds his son Alcmaeon assuming his inherited role as a warrior-seer, is closely connected to and promotes the same positive image of inheritance as a second gnomic statement in the ode. In this famous *gnōmē*, the speaking subject of the poem announces:

ἐπάμερον· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ
ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ' ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ,
λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰών.

(*P.* 8.95–7)

Creatures of a day! What is someone? What is no one? A dream of a shade is man. But whenever Zeus-given brightness comes, a shining light rests upon men, and a gentle life.

(trans. Race, adapted)

As Nagy observes:

I interpret *skias onar* "dream of a shade" as a recapitulation of the earlier words of the dead Amphiarus about his living son. In Homeric usage the word *skia* can designate a dead person. I suggest that the shade of the dead person is literally dreaming – that is, realizing through its dreams – the living person. In other words, the occasion of the victory in a mortal's day-to-day lifetime is that singular moment when the dark insubstantiality of an ancestor's shade is translated, through its dreams, into the shining life-force of the victor in full possession of victory, radiant with the brightness of Zeus. It is as if we the living were the realization of the dreams dreamt by our dead ancestors.⁶²

I would suggest that one effect of the combination of these two gnomic statements, the first introduced by a verb meaning 'to speak in riddles', is to call to mind the riddle of the Sphinx and Oedipus' correct response. The Sphinx's riddle ('What

goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?') and its answer ('Man') play with the notion that many seemingly different entities can be one and the same thing: in the case of Oedipus himself, that the same man can be, for instance, both father and brother to his sons, can be both husband and son to his mother. In Pindar's confounding statement 'man is the dream of a shade', the Sphinx's riddle and answer are inverted: a single man is the dream of a shade. That is, as Nagy explains, a man is the dream of his dead ancestors, whose excellence he reactivates during his own lifetime before passing it on to the next generation: one man is but the present manifestation of the many men who have come before him in his family line. Thus, it would seem, even the riddle of the Sphinx can be rehabilitated in order to celebrate Pindar's epinician vision of fathers and sons.

Notes

- 1 Despite this overlap, there have been surprising few comparative studies of the two texts. For two such studies, see Nagy 2000, who is ultimately interested in the tragedy's and epinician's relation to epic, and Griffiths 2014.
- 2 For tragedy's interest in intra-familial violence as a way of negatively representing the *oikos* and endorsing the *polis* as a necessary institution, see, e.g., Goldhill 1986:57–106, Seaford 1994, Zeitlin 2009.
- 3 See Wilson 2002, 2003, Kowalzig 2004, 2006, Kurke 2013. Kurke 2013 reads *Pythian* 11 as a response to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.
- 4 On the absence of the Epigonoï in Aeschylus' *Seven*, see Edmunds 100–3, and Sommerstein in this volume.
- 5 Zeitlin 2009:84.
- 6 Zeitlin 2009:84–5.
- 7 Further, Amphiaraus' repeated use of words for 'father' in his speech against Polynices consistently calls Oedipus to mind. As Zeitlin 2009:86 observes, 'Amphiaraus speaks the language of the father.'
- 8 Zeitlin 2009:87. See also Zeitlin 2009:84: 'Amphiaraus is the agent of transformation, who begins the process of reversal, which will restore Eteokles as the child of his father and hence as the enemy of his brother.'
- 9 Cf. Zeitlin 2009:86: 'Domestic disorder in both generations is a threat to the city as it is to the family.'
- 10 Pairs of generals and seers include Leonidas and Megistias (Hdt. 7.221); Tolmides and Theaenetus (Paus. 1.27.5; cf. Thuc. 3.20.1); Kimon and Astyphilus of Poseidonia (Plut. *Kim.* 18); Nicias and Stilibiades (Plut. *Nic.* 23.5); Aristander and Alexander (Plut. *Alex.* 2.3, 14.5, and 25.1–2).
- 11 In *Seven*, the doomed Tydeus berates Amphiaraus for refusing to let him cross the Ismenos river (377–83); Mardonius decides to ignore his Greek seer Hegesistratus' interpretation of the omens and to engage in battle with the Greeks at Plataea, where he is ultimately killed (Hdt. 9.41–42); Alexander falls ill after disregarding Aristander's reading of an omen (Arr. 4.4). See also Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.17–19 and 4.8.35–9 for two Spartans who disobey omens and are wounded or killed as a result. As a counter-example, in the *Iliad*, Agamemnon insults Calchas but ultimately agrees to follow his advice to return Chryseis to her father (*Il.* 1.106–17). Agamemnon specifically says that he obeys Calchas because he does not wish for his army to be destroyed (i.e., he knows that if he acts contrary to Calchas' pronouncements he will only bring disaster upon his men).
- 12 Flower 2008:159.
- 13 See Bremmer 1996 and note his conclusion: '[I]n ancient Greece the position of seers seems to have depended on the quality of the kings: the weaker the kings, the stronger

- the seers' (109). Dillery 2005:209 writes that '[t]he seer contests with the polis for supreme authority.'
- 14 See Foster 2013 for further examples.
 - 15 See, e.g., Hom. *Od.* 15.223–57; Pi. *O.* 6.13, *N.* 9. 13, 24; Ps. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.2. See also Pausanias' ecphrasis of the chest of Cypselus (5.17.5–8). In *Seven*, even Amphiaras' patronymic seems to be put to use not for his own characterization but to underscore how he combines aspects of Eteocles and Oedipus and so brings those two characters closer together: Zeitlin 2009:87 notes that 'Oikles' (in the genitive 'Oikleous') can be read as a conflation or 'syncopation' of *Oidipous*' and *Eteokles*' own names.
 - 16 Intriguingly, the same verb appears in the context of the Seven in Pindar's *Nemean* 9: the poet says that on the pyres for the Seven the slain heroes 'fatten' the smoke with their dead bodies (*N.* 9.23).
 - 17 Although *moros* is ambiguous and can also mean 'doom' or 'fate', it frequently means 'death,' including in its other occurrences in Aeschylean tragedy, and is typically translated in this passage as such.
 - 18 See also Sineux 2007:58, who connects Amphiaras' characterization in *Seven* to the Athenians' view that they themselves acted with justice and piety during the Persian Wars.
 - 19 Scholars compare Megistias' behaviour at Thermopylae to the archetypal act of Amphiaras (see, e.g., Flower 2008:183–4), but I wonder if it should not be the other way around. To the best of my knowledge, Aeschylus' emphasis on Amphiaras' willingness to remain with the doomed Seven is the earliest reference to Amphiaras behaving in this way. It may be possible that Aeschylus is influenced by the tradition surrounding Megistias and not vice versa.
 - 20 Trans. Sommerstein. Amphiaras' shield is also said to be blank in Eur. *Phoen.* 1111–12.
 - 21 Asclepiades of Mirlea says this line was taken from the *Thebaid* (PEG 1 F 10 = 7 EGF = 6 GEF). In a similar characterization, perhaps also influenced by the *Thebaid*, the messenger in *Seven* describes Amphiaras as a 'seer excellent in battle' (ἀλκίῳ τ' ἄριστον μάχῃ, 568–9).
 - 22 Pfeijffer 1999:533 makes this connection as well.
 - 23 On snakes and divination, see, e.g., Ogden 2001:84.
 - 24 On the chthonic associations of snakes, see Ogden 2001:84. Ogden 2001:85 notes that the place-name Knopia, one of the possible locations for Amphiaras' Theban oracle, might mean 'place of snakes'. In this context, we might also note a later fourth-century relief of Amphiaras from Oropos which depicts a sleeping patient whose arm is licked by a snake and to whom Amphiaras himself appears (see Ustinova 2002:269 with Krauskopf 1981:no. 63.)
 - 25 Nagy 2000:102, 111. Nagy also argues that Alcmaeon's shield directly evokes these negative snake images, including Hippomedon's blazon, in *Seven*.
 - 26 For the Amphiareion and its contested location, see Part II.
 - 27 For Amphiaras' engulfment, see, e.g., Pi. *N.* 9.21–7.
 - 28 The juxtaposition between the pairings of Amphiaras–Alcmaeon and Adrastus–Aegialeus is also in keeping with a more pervasive tendency in *Pythian* 8 to follow a positive exemplum with its negative counterpart. See *P.* 8.81–92 with Pfeijffer 1999:439.
 - 29 As scholars have noted, the whole story of the Epigonoι is suppressed in *Seven*; see Edmunds 100–3 and Sommerstein in this volume. Part of Pindar's restoration, then, is to reconnect the sequel myth of the Epigonoι to the myth of the Seven.
 - 30 See Foster chapter 5 (forthcoming).
 - 31 See Pfeijffer 1999:528.
 - 32 See, e.g., Soph. *Aj.* 1157–8, and Eur. *Ion* 430 and *El.* 946. See also Ar. *Av.* 970.
 - 33 Aesch. *Ag.* 1112 and 1183, *Cho.* 887, *PV* 610; Soph. *OT* 393 and 1525; Eur. *Supp.* 138 and 1064, *Tro.* 625, *Ion* 533, *Hel.* 788, *Pho.* 48, 1049, 1688, 1731, 1759, *IA* 1147, and fr. 83 line 20.

- 34 The fragment is preserved in Athenaeus' *Learned Banqueters* Book 2. In the Loeb edition, the translator, Olson, glosses 'Oedipus' riddle' here with a clarification: 'Actually the riddle of the Sphinx.' But Epicharmus' description of the riddle as Oedipus' is revealing, for it highlights the perceived inseparability between Oedipus and the riddle.
- 35 Note that *triados* in Greek literally refers to the intersection of three roads. I translate this term, however, by the more common English phrase 'crossroads', although this translation does not quite capture the Greek configuration (Cf. Kurke 2013:115n.41).
- 36 See Kurke 2013:116, especially n.46.
- 37 See Reinhardt 1966:352–53, 1979: 117, 256 n.21.
- 38 Kurke 2013:118, citing Antiphanes fr. 189 KA, ll. 1–8, Pl. *Leg.* 8.838c, Plut. *Mor.* 348f–49a. As Kurke 2013:117 observes, the myth's default connection with tragedy, despite the representations of Oedipus in other genres such as epic and lyric and in iconography, is in keeping with what Taplin and Wilson have argued in regards to the Erinyes and the *Oresteia*: according to Taplin and Wilson 1993:176, the Erinyes became synonymous with tragedy after the performance of the *Oresteia* in later literature and material culture.
- 39 Taplin 1982:157. See also Kurke 2013:118.
- 40 Steiner *ap.* Taplin 1982:181. Italics in original.
- 41 Kurke 2013.
- 42 Kurke 2013:120.
- 43 To my knowledge, there are no other extant versions of the myth of the Epigonoι in which Amphiarus-as-oracle delivers a prophecy. In the Pindaric corpus, the other three references to Amphiarus are clearly placed during the time of the Seven (*O.* 6.13; *N.* 9.13; *N.* 9.24; *I.* 7.33). *I.* 7.33 simply mentions Amphiarus in a list of warrior-heroes.
- 44 See Slater 1969 s.v. *νιός*.
- 45 Fittingly, as he makes this claim, Amphiarus himself is identified, uniquely within the Pindaric corpus, not by name but only as the child of his father (Οἰκλέος παῖς, 39).
- 46 I would contend that part of the passage's underappreciated purpose is to be enigmatic, a quality that allows for the mythic portion's assimilation of Amphiarus and Alcmaeon to continue, as we will see.
- 47 For the poet as *ego*, see especially D'Alessio 1994:135–6, Robbins 1997:270, Pfeijffer 1999:540–5, Nagy 2000:103, Martin 2004:532–5. For the victor as speaking subject, see, e.g., Currie 2010:59. For the chorus: see, e.g. Burnett 2005:231. See Burnett 2005:231n.22 for a thorough bibliographical breakdown of these three different perspectives on the identity of the coda's *ego*.
- 48 As D'Alessio 1994:136n. 61 observes, '[T]he wording suggests that the episode was not simply an answer from an oracular shrine but a real epiphany.' See Hubbard 1993:194 for bibliography on a range of other possibilities (dream vision, shrine, statue at Delphi). Hubbard himself 1993:201n.33 sees the encounter as an epiphany, but an epiphany of Amphiarus. Pfeijffer 1999:544–5, who views it as an epiphany of Alcmaeon, notes how this epiphany forms a parallel with the epiphany of Amphiarus in the mythic portion. The double epiphanies thus mark another convergence between fathers and sons in the ode.
- 49 One of the most frequently cited dissenters to this scenario is Hubbard 1993, who argues that Pindar witnesses the epiphany of Amphiarus, not Alcmaeon. Pfeijffer 1999:542–5 convincingly refutes this possibility. As Pfeijffer 1999:544 concludes, 'Pindar's syntax leaves us no choice but to take Alcmaeon as the subject of the ὅτι clause; because the first person must refer to the poet, the traditional interpretation of the passage must be correct: it describes an encounter between the poet and the dead hero Alcmaeon on the road to Delphi.' Hubbard's argument may be untenable, but it is valuable insofar as it exposes just how extraordinary and confounding Alcmaeon's epiphany is. On the cultural context of this epiphany, see Foster chapter 5 (forthcoming).
- 50 As Pfeijffer 1999:544 laments, 'That there is no evidence of a cult of Alcmaeon near Thebes is annoying.'

- 51 On *geiton* as signifying a local hero, see Rusten 1983, Burnett 2005:232.
- 52 For the ode's emphasis on physical contact, see Martin 2004.
- 53 Pfeijffer 1999:544 considers the possibility that the epiphany of Alcmaeon actually took place at the Amphiareion. The Amphiareion, at least at a later date, featured epiphanies of Amphiaraus (see Ustinova 2002:269).
- 54 See Hdt. 1.46, 1.49, 1.52, 1.92, and 8.134.1; Strab. 9.1.22, Plu. *De. def. or.* 411f–12b, Paus. 9.8.3 with Hubbard 1993:196–7.
- 55 For the location of Potniae in relation to Thebes, see Paus. 9.8.1.
- 56 Schol. ad *OT* line 733 (= Aesch. fr. 173 N² = fr. 387a Radt). See also Rusten 1996:101–2, Kurke 2013:144.
- 57 Kurke 2013:144–6. Aeschylus' interest in Potniae because the cult of Demeter and Persephone was located there is further supported by Nauck 1889: 157: Nauck connects Aeschylus' unusual choice of Potniae to an intriguing comment by Aristotle and its accompanying gloss by a scholiast: these two references suggest that Aeschylus was thought to have disclosed certain secrets of the Mysteries in a number of his tragedies, including *Oedipus*, the play from his Theban trilogy to which the crossroads fragment may belong.
- 58 For examples of 'cult skirmishing', see Wilson 2002, 2003.
- 59 The verb appears two other times in the Pindaric corpus and both times it means 'to be accompanied by': *O.* 2.96 and *I.* 2.2. Its appearance here is thus the only time that Pindar uses it in the same way as he does in *Pythian* 8, with its absolute meaning 'to meet'.
- 60 See *Ag.* 72–82 with Kurke 2013:118–20.
- 61 Kurke 2013:120.
- 62 Nagy 2000: 111, quoting Nagy 1994: 195–6.

Part III

The destruction of Thebes, ancient and modern



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9 Aeschylus and the destruction of Thebes

What did Apollo's oracle mean?

Alan H. Sommerstein

It is one of the most basic data of Greek heroic saga that the unsuccessful attack on Thebes by Adrastus, king of Argos, and his seven champions, one of whom was the exiled Theban prince Polynices, was followed in the next generation by the capture and destruction of the city in a renewed attack by the sons of the Seven, known as the Epigonoι. The story is already taken for granted in the *Iliad*, in which two of the Epigonoι, Diomedes and Sthenelus – and probably a third, Euryalus (2.565–6, 23.677–8) – are characters. When Agamemnon upbraids Diomedes for being inferior in valour to his father Tydeus, one of the Seven (*Iliad* 4.368–400), Diomedes makes no reply, but Sthenelus angrily retorts that, on the contrary, the Epigonoι are better men than their fathers, because they captured Thebes when the Seven had failed to do so, though their army was smaller and Thebes better fortified than before (4.403–10). Likewise, the Boeotian entry in the Catalogue of Ships (2.494–510) does not mention Thebes in its list of twenty-nine Boeotian towns but includes the ‘well-built citadel’ of Lower Thebes (*Hypothēbai*, 2.505), evidently envisaged as a suburb which escaped destruction or was settled by survivors, Thebes itself not yet having been rebuilt. When the Theban part of the Epic Cycle was created, it included an *Epigonoι*;¹ and just as the Trojan saga had a pendant in the subsequent career of Odysseus, right down to his death at the hands of his unrecognized son in the *Telegony*, so the Theban saga had its pendant in the subsequent career of Alcmaeon, the matricidal son of Amphiaraus, who had been the leader of the Epigonoι, presumably narrated in the *Alcmaeonis* (though none of the surviving fragments of that poem is actually concerned with Alcmaeon).²

Aeschylus wrote a tragedy *Epigonoι*, but we know virtually nothing about it except that it included a wedding (fr. 55). Prospectively, however, the destruction of Thebes played a vital role in the trilogy centred on the house of Laius, which he produced in 467 BCE. Starting with an oracle given to Laius at Delphi at a time which must be decades before the action of the first play, *Laius*, the threat of destruction hangs over Thebes and its people until the city is saved (or so we, and the chorus of Theban maidens, are told) by a victorious battle in which, however, the two sons of Oedipus die at each other's hands. After that – but we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us go back to the beginning, as the chorus do in the ode (*Seven* 720–91) which they sing while the fatal combat between Eteocles and Polynices is in progress beyond the city walls.

Laius, say the chorus, was told by Apollo at Delphi ‘to die without offspring and save his city’ (748–9); he was told this three times (746), meaning that on receiving this response he asked twice for a more favourable one and each time was merely given the same answer again. We do not know whether it was explained anywhere in the trilogy why Laius went to Delphi in the first place. Perhaps, as in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* (13–16), he went to ask what he should do in order to have children, his marriage having been long barren; he would have been utterly taken aback to be told, in effect or perhaps explicitly (cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 17–20), to make sure he never had any.

If Thebes was to survive, then, Laius had to accept the wretched fate of dying childless. He deliberately defied the oracle (*Seven* 746 Ἀπόλλωνος . . . βίαι ‘in despite of Apollo’, 842 βουλαὶ . . . ἄπιστοι ‘a disobedient decision’) in what both the chorus and the messenger call an ‘ill-counselled’ act (*Seven* 750, 802) and made his wife pregnant. Some time in the next nine months he repented of this folly, and when the baby was born it was exposed in a pot (Aesch. fr. 122); but the child was rescued, grew up, and eventually met Laius, neither knowing who the other was, and killed him, apparently at a road junction at Potniae, just south of Thebes (Aesch. fr. 387a).

Laius had thus died leaving a child behind him, though he never knew it. And immediately Thebes was in danger of destruction; for it was just at this time that the Sphinx, ‘the man-snatching death-demon’ (*Seven* 776–7), came to the city, seemingly intent on destroying its population one by one, until Oedipus ‘removed [her] from the land’, presumably (as in artistic representations and later literary texts) either by killing her or by inducing her to kill herself.³ Terrible things happened in Thebes thereafter (cf. *Seven* 753–7, 778–90), but they did not threaten to destroy the city (unless the plague of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* had an Aeschylean precedent – on which there is no evidence, either for or against) until after Oedipus’ death, when Adrastus’ army, with Polynices as one of its leading members, marched on Thebes. When *Seven* begins, the city has been under siege for a considerable time (21–3), and for nearly 800 lines we are not allowed to forget that its people are in fear lest today may see the fulfilment of Laius’ oracle.

Eteocles begins the play by urging the Theban citizen-soldiers to rally to the defence of their city and its gods ‘so as never to let their rites be obliterated’ (15). The Scout then reports that the Seven (including, as we later learn, Polynices – though he is never mentioned until 576) have sworn to sack and destroy the city or perish in the attempt (42–8); when he has completed his report and departed, Eteocles, left alone, prays to Zeus, Earth, the gods of the city, and the Erinyes (or Curse) of his father Oedipus, that the city may not be extirpated, destroyed, enslaved (69–75). A panicked chorus enters and makes frenzied appeals to the gods to save them from slavery (110, cf. 253), asking, ‘what is happening, and what will happen, to our city?’ (156). Eteocles rebukes them, telling them that they are doing the enemy’s work for them and ‘sacking the city from within’ (194, cf. 254); their response includes a fervent wish that they may not see ‘this city stormed through by the enemy, and its people devoured by their fire’ (220–2). When Eteocles prays in their presence (271–6) he strikes a very different note: he vows rich offerings

and dedications in the event of victory, and in his entire speech (264–86) he makes only one veiled reference to the possibility of defeat (he calls it ‘what is fated’, 281). It makes no difference. As soon as Eteocles has gone, the chorus sing a long ode, four of whose six strophes (321–68) are entirely devoted to the horrors that can be expected to follow the city’s capture: the buildings destroyed by fire (321–5, 341), the males slaughtered (340–1, 346–7), including young children (348–50), the women dragged off as booty (326–37) into forced concubinage (363–8), the property plundered or, if not worth taking, scattered to the winds (351–62). There is another significant little feature in this song, generally overlooked, which I shall mention later.

There follows the long scene in which, six times over, the Scout describes one after another of the attacking Seven, Eteocles nominates a Theban to oppose him, and the chorus sing a short stanza. Most of the attackers boast of their intention to destroy, sack, or burn Thebes (427–8, 434, 465–7, 531, 582–3); Eteocles is careful throughout his first six speeches not to utter any word of ill omen, but the chorus, though they control their utterances rather better than hitherto, still picture Capaneus ‘plundering me by arrogant armed force from my maiden abode’ (454–6). Then the Scout reveals that the attacker at the seventh gate is Polynices. His desire is to rule the city (647–8), not to destroy it, but even if we have forgotten the oath in which he took part, we may reasonably doubt whether in the event of victory he would be able to restrain his mostly brutal, ruthless colleagues. On learning whom he will be opposing, Eteocles thinks no longer of the city, which he never mentions again, but only of the curse of Oedipus (and its causes going back to Laius, 692) and his hatred of his brother; and the chorus too, in their reaction, think of nothing but how they can dissuade him from incurring the irremediable pollution of fratricide. But when he departs on his last journey, they reflect on the oracular nexus that binds the fate of Laius’ family to the fate of the city (746–9). The city was to be safe if Laius died without offspring. Laius did leave offspring behind him, but his two grandsons are fighting each other, and the chorus are already sure (as, of course, the audience are) that they will kill each other, reflecting on what the consequences will be *when* (not *if*) they do so (734–6). Will that satisfy the demand of the oracle? Laius is dead, and he has (now), or will have very shortly, no (living) offspring (or will he? we shall have to come back to this). Is that enough, or did he have to be childless at the moment of his death? Who can tell?⁴ ‘I fear’, sing the chorus, ‘that together with the princes the city may be laid low’ (764–5).

Enter a messenger, and his first word is *θαρσείτε* ‘take courage’, ‘have no fear’ (792); his second sentence declares that Thebes has ‘escaped the yoke of slavery’ (793), and he repeats this message twice in different words (795–6, 815; 820 is probably spurious). The city’s safety and the death of the two brothers are presented as independent events: we are not encouraged to view the latter as a necessary condition for the former – though we are also not positively discouraged from doing so. The choral anapaests 822–31 take the same line, the chorus asking whether they should rejoice in the safety of the city or weep for the two princes; but these lines too have been widely, and probably rightly, thought spurious on unrelated grounds (see Dawe 1978:88–9; West 1990:119–20 could

defend the passage only in part and only by drastic emendation), and certainly from 832 onwards (with probably one exception to which we will return) the chorus sing only of the two dead brothers, both before and after their bodies are brought on stage; and correspondingly, except for brief references to the oracle (844) and to Laius' defiance of it (842), the catastrophe is no longer ascribed to Apollo (as at 692, 800–1, and probably 812–14) but to the curse or Erinyes of Oedipus (832–3, 841, 886–7, 897–9; cf. 954–5, 977–8, 987–8), or to Ares the spirit of violent strife (910, 945), or to the iron that was destined to settle the brothers' quarrel (788–90, 911–4, 941–3), or to *Atē* (Ruin) (958), or to Moira (Destiny) (976, 986), or – once – to the supreme god Zeus, mentioned indirectly as part of a compound adjective (948).

There can be no doubt that during this last part of *Seven*, the overwhelmingly predominant concern is that of mourning for Eteocles and Polynices. The dominant view in recent scholarship has been that this is the *sole* concern and that previous anxieties over the fate of the city are entirely forgotten.⁵ The mention of the oracle at 844 is held to be a recognition that it has now been fulfilled. In a certain sense, of course, we, the audience, are aware that Thebes will in fact be destroyed in the next generation; but we are expected, as it were, to park that awareness and think, as the chorus do, only of the present. But there is a certain illogic here. The oracle was that Laius should save his city by dying without offspring. This could mean either that Laius should never have a child, or that he should have no surviving child at the time of his death, or that his descent line should at some point be extinguished. If the oracle is understood in either of the first two senses, then the city was already beyond saving either at the moment of Oedipus' birth or at the moment of Laius' death, and the death of Oedipus' sons had nothing to do with the oracle. If this day's events are to count as the fulfilment of the oracle, then the oracle must be taken in the third and most lenient sense, and moreover the death of Eteocles and Polynices must mark the end of the descent line of Laius.

Well, *has* that descent line in fact been extinguished? In the play as we have it, of course, the answer turns out to be no, as Antigone and Ismene appear and join in the lament; but it has long been generally and rightly accepted that their involvement, and the passages that require their presence (861–74, 1005–78, and probably 996–7), formed no part of the play as Aeschylus wrote it.⁶ On the other hand, the explicit statement (828) that the brothers were 'childless' also comes in a passage suspect for other reasons and cannot be relied on. What can be said is that, in the genuine text, no member of Eteocles' and Polynices' family appears to mourn for them, and that a good many expressions are most naturally taken as implying that the house is extinct. When Eteocles is resisting the chorus' pressure to refrain from fighting his brother, he speaks of 'the waves of Cocytus' as the allotted portion of 'the whole race of Laius' (689–91). The messenger, reporting the death of the two brothers, says that a god has destroyed or is destroying (*ἀναλοῖ*) 'that ill-starred race'. At 877 the brothers are described as having captured or killed (*ἐλόντες* can mean either⁷) their father's house with the point of the spear; to which another part of the chorus responds (878–9) that they have found wretched deaths 'to the ruin (*λύμη*) of their house'. A moment later they are described as having demolished

the walls of their house (δομάτων ἐρειψίτοιχοι, 881) and then as having struck a blow that pierced the house, as well as their bodies, right through (διανταίαν . . . δόμοισι καὶ σώμασιν, 895–6). The Curses/Erinyes have raised a cry of triumph after putting the family (γένους) completely to flight (954–6). It would appear that by destroying each other, the two brothers have simultaneously destroyed the house of Laius. It would also appear that the god-powered process that brought this about is now complete: Dawson (1970:24) notes the prominence of the theme of finality in the strophic pair 933–60 (936 νείκεος ἐν τελευτῇ ‘in the ending of their strife’, 938 πέπανται . . . ἔχθος ‘the hatred is ended’, 941 λυτὴρ νεικέων ‘resolver of strife’, 959–60 δυοῖν κρατήσας ἔληξε δαίμων ‘the divine power has defeated two men and ceased acting’).

As for Antigone and Ismene, these expressions imply either that they do not exist or perhaps that they are already dead. We know that Mimnermus (fr. 21) said that ‘Ismene on the one hand (μέν) was killed by Tydeus, on the instructions of Athena, because she was having an affair with Theoclymenus’, an episode for which there is other mythographic and artistic evidence⁸ (and which must, of course, have happened before the final battle in which all the Seven, including Tydeus, perished), and that μέν implies that Mimnermus also had something to say about the fate which (on the other hand) befell Antigone. We do not know whether he got rid of Antigone also before the death of her brothers, but it is striking that our source, the Sallustian hypothesis to Sophocles’ play, contrasts Mimnermus’ treatment with that of Ion of Chios (*PMG* 740), according to whom both sisters survived the war and were later burned to death in the temple of Hera by Laodamas, son of Eteocles (more about him in a moment). Symmetry would suggest that if in Ion both sisters died substantially later than their brothers, then in Mimnermus they both died substantially earlier. Antigone and Ismene, at any rate, are, as it were, spare parts; they can be disposed of without harm to the core story. But there are two members of the family who, *prima facie*, are harder to get rid of. In almost all versions of the saga, Eteocles and Polynices each left a son (Laodamas and Thersander respectively), and these played crucial roles in the war that led to the final destruction of Thebes. Has Aeschylus abolished them? And if he has, what might that imply for the story of the destruction?

Well, he does seem to have done something that ought logically to be tantamount to abolishing Laodamas. The Eteocles who wishes, in the optative mood, that he may never, in bad times or in good, share a home (ζύνοικος εἶην, cf. ζυνοικεῖν ‘be married to’) with any woman can hardly already be a married man, and there are other indications that he is quite young (Sommerstein 2010b:82–8). As a matter of fact, we hear nothing about Laodamas before Ion of Chios, but Herodotus (5.61) saw at Thebes an inscription, which at least to him looked ancient, purporting to have been composed by Laodamas, so we need not doubt that already in archaic times he was normally assumed to have been king of Thebes when it was attacked by the Epigonoι and, no doubt, as in the later accounts, to have been killed in the battle that decided that war. However, it would in principle be possible to dispense with him and suppose that the kingship was given to a member of another family. And yet, as we shall see, Aeschylus does not allow us to forget about Laodamas completely.

Polynices' wife and son are still more firmly fixed in the saga. His marriage to a daughter of Adrastus is fundamental to the story of the Seven, and their son Thersander, who is included in all listings of the Epigonoι,⁹ not only survives the war but takes part in the early stages of the expedition against Troy, being killed by Telephus during the abortive attack on Teuthrania (*Cypria* Arg. 7 West). In Aeschylus, Polynices is significantly paired with Adrastus' other son-in-law, Tydeus, in the denunciation of Amphiaraus (*Seven* 571ff.). In real life, of course, then as now, many a marriage will have remained childless; but it is a rare thing in Greek heroic saga, and if one was going to take the even more unusual course of assuming a marriage to have been childless when this had not been so in the earlier tradition, one would need to make this perfectly clear – as indeed the author of 822–31 tried to do. Aeschylus could have done this, and thus firmly warned us that we were to regard the catastrophe of this day as a final one and not to look into the future; he apparently chose not to.

I shall now show that Aeschylus has done more than this: that at two moments in the play he has taken special measures to remind his audience of the coming destruction of Thebes. In the *stasimon* 287–368, as the chorus imagine the horrors of a sack, they sing (343–4) of 'raving Ares' blowing a sooty blast over the burning city, 'defiling piety', and they give the fearsome god the epithet 'subduer of hosts', *laodamas*. It can hardly be a coincidence that this adjective is used in connection with the feared destruction of a city that was in fact destroyed not long afterwards when, according to the usual tradition, Laodamas was its ruler. The epithet, moreover, as a vocabulary word, appears to have been coined for the occasion; to the scholiasts – and most likely to Aeschylus' audience – *laodamas* was otherwise known only as a proper name. By bringing it in like this, Aeschylus is making us think of the destruction of Thebes even though his portrayal of Eteocles leaves no room for the existence of this son of his.

In the latter part of the play there are two passages that have often been held to allude to the destruction. One of them, 902–3, can safely be discounted. This passage refers to the fate of the possessions of Oedipus, for which Eteocles and Polynices had contended and died. It reads, in most manuscripts, μένει κτέανά τ' ἐπιγόνους, which would mean 'and the property remains for the Epigonoι'. This must be corrupt, since τ' 'and' has no function; unfortunately strophic responsion is of no help in restoring the text, since the corresponding verse in the strophe is missing. But ἐπιγόνους also can hardly be right: the scholia know nothing of any reference to the Epigonoι, saying only that the property for which the brothers perished will belong to *others* (ἄλλοις).¹⁰ Presumably ἐπιγόνους is a gloss attempting to explain who these 'others' are.

But it is otherwise with the other passage, sixty lines earlier (843–4). After reflecting on the efficacy of Oedipus' curse and the consequences of Laius' defiance of Apollo, the chorus sing:

μέριμνα δ' ἄμφι πόλιν
θέσφατ' οὐκ ἀμβλύνεται.

There are two possible interpretations of the second colon (literally, ‘oracles are not blunted’, ‘oracles do not lose their edge’). (1) It might refer to the present: ‘Events have shown that time has not dulled the edge of the oracle: the city has been saved, but the necessary price for this has been the extinction of the house of Laius.’ Or (2) it might refer to the future: ‘The oracle is bound to be fulfilled eventually: Laius did not die childless, and therefore, depending on how we understand the oracle, though the city has been saved today, it may be doomed nevertheless.’ Both of these would be possible interpretations of 844, standing alone; but they require different meanings to be put on the words *μέριμνα* and *ἀμφί* in 843. On interpretation (1), 843 will mean ‘There is lamentation throughout the city’ (so Hutchinson 1985, Sommerstein 2008) or perhaps ‘There is grief/despair throughout the city’ (so, respectively, Ewans 1996, Collard 2008); on interpretation (2), it will mean ‘There is anxiety concerning the city’ (so Rose 1957, Dawson 1970). In which direction does Aeschylean usage point?¹¹

The answer is unequivocal. The regular meaning of *μέριμνα* in Aeschylus is ‘thought, concern, anxiety’ (290, *Pers.* 165, *Ag.* 99, 460, 1531, *Eum.* 132, 360), and he never provably uses the word to mean ‘lamentation’ or ‘grief’ or ‘despair’ (its meaning in the corrupt line *Seven* 849 is unclear), nor indeed does Sophocles.¹² As to *ἀμφί* – considering only passages where, as here, it governs an accusative – it means ‘concerning, about’ in *Supp.* 246 εἴρηκας ἀμφί κόσμον ἀνγευδῆ λόγον ‘what you have said about our attire is perfectly true’ and in Aesch. fr. 204b9–10 ὕμνον ἀμφί τὸν δόντα ‘a song about the giver [of fire]’, and it never in Aeschylus bears the kind of meaning that interpretation (1) would require – when the same phrase, *ἀμφί πόλιν*, occurs in *Seven* 151 it means ‘around the city’ and refers to the besieging army outside the walls, as in epic passages like *Iliad* 9.530.¹³

The chorus, then, and the Theban people generally, are by no means so sure as the messenger that the city is now safe. Before they knew of the outcome of the brothers’ fight, they feared (764–5) that their death might not avert the fall of the city; and despite the defeat of the Argive army, that apprehension has not gone away. If Laius’ oracle required only that Laius’ descent line should become extinct, then its demands have been satisfied (provided we assume Eteocles to have been unmarried and Polynices childless). But if it required that Laius at the time of his death should leave no offspring behind him (or that he should never have had any offspring), then the city’s doom was already sealed before today’s battle, and victory can have gained only a temporary respite. The Thebans do not know which interpretation is correct; but we do. And they seem to have half guessed that the gloomier interpretation is the more likely; for after this point, as we have seen, the saving of the city is never mentioned again in the genuine text (though the author of the added ending refers to it at 1044 and 1074–8).

Aeschylus is thus having his cake and eating it.¹⁴ Most of the time, as is appropriate to the end of a trilogy, he gives the impression that the story is complete; but he also plays on his audience’s prior knowledge that it is not. In *Antigone*, whose action is set on the day after that of *Seven*, Sophocles does something similar. The chorus describe Antigone and Ismene, both just sentenced to death, as the ‘last root’ of the house of Oedipus (599–600), which implies that no male descendant

of the house remains; later (895, 941), after Ismene has disappeared from the play, Antigone will describe *herself* as the last of the family. But then we are told by Tiresias (1080–3) that ‘all the cities are stirred up in hostility’ by the denial of burial to the rest of the Seven and perhaps to other enemy dead also; this is usually taken as pointing to the intervention of Theseus, which secured the release of these bodies for burial (by diplomacy, we are told, in Aeschylus’ *Eleusinians*; by force in Euripides’ *Suppliants*), but the dishonouring of the Seven also provides a powerful motive for their sons to seek revenge (cf. Jebb 1900:191–2, Griffith 1999:308), and the reference to the hostility of ‘all the cities’ suggests action not by Athens (which had not been involved in the expedition of the Seven) but by the same Argive-led coalition that had fought the war just ended.¹⁵ Like Aeschylus, Sophocles wants to have the house of Laius destroyed, but like Aeschylus, he also wants it not to be completely forgotten that Thebes, having survived one perilous attack, will fall to another before very long. Only, where Aeschylus traced Thebes’ doom to Laius’ decision to defy an oracle, Sophocles traced it to Creon’s decision to defy the unwritten laws.

In *Seven*, then, although the coming destruction of Thebes is never explicitly predicted and is only briefly and vaguely foreshadowed, it will be present to spectators’ minds and will colour their response to the latter part of *Seven* and, retrospectively, to the whole play. If the fall of Thebes was unavoidable from the moment of Laius’ death (or even earlier), was not the courage and determination of Eteocles (and the other six Theban champions) futile? Or are they after all to be praised on the ground that, as Eteocles himself put it, even an inevitable fate ought to be met nobly rather than ignobly (cf. 683–5, 716–17)? If the chorus’ laments are anything to go by, we are encouraged to think of the first answer rather than the second, for they never praise the valour or wisdom of either of the brothers (once again the added ending strikes a different note, at least in the case of Eteocles: 1007–11, 1074–8). On the other hand we may also remember Eteocles’ own praise of Amphiaraus, who went knowingly to his death in a cause that he knew to be wrong and disastrous (597–619) – praise, coming from an enemy, in which we were certainly meant to concur. Eteocles was no Amphiaraus: he had wronged his brother,¹⁶ and at the climax, while honour was clearly part of his motivation for insisting on going to fight Polynices, raw hatred was part of it too. But he still had courage, and he had managed the defence of his city well (except for his own role) and successfully.

That *Seven* ends under the shadow of subsequent events that are known to the audience but unknown (or not known for certain) to the characters is a feature it shares with most of the surviving plays of Sophocles.¹⁷ *Antigone* has already been mentioned. In *Women of Trachis* the unknown future event is the apotheosis of Heracles;¹⁸ in *Ajax* it is the anger of Telamon against Teucer, which Teucer himself apprehensively foresees (*Ajax* 1008–20) but which had never occurred to Ajax; in *Oedipus Tyrannus* it is the fate of Oedipus’ children (cf. *OT* 1459–1514); in *Philoctetes* it is the crimes of Neoptolemus at Troy, especially the sacrilegious murder of Priam (cf. *Phil.* 1440–4); in *Oedipus at Colonus* it is the fate of Antigone, who pleads with Polynices to abandon his war and then, with her sister,

voluntarily returns to Thebes in the hope of reconciling her brothers. The case of *Electra* is disputed.¹⁹

There is no comparable 'shadow of the future' in other surviving Aeschylean plays, but then there are, besides *Seven*, only two, *Persians* and *Eumenides*, in which such a thing would even be possible, since all the others have, or had, connected sequels. And both *Persians* and *Eumenides* end with the star of Athens in the ascendant, so that dismal forebodings would be inappropriate. We cannot tell how such matters were handled in lost Aeschylean plays – whether, for instance, Achilles was made aware of his own coming death in *Nereids* or *Phrygians*, as he is in the *Iliad*. In Euripides the future is normally foretold at the end of the play, by a *deus ex machina* or otherwise, but sometimes important facts are concealed. Jason is told by Medea of the inglorious manner of his own death (*Med.* 1386–8); but Aegeus invites her to Athens as a welcome guest, not knowing, as the audience do, that she will later plot against the life of his only son. In *Suppliants* (1213–26) Aegialeus, son of Adrastus, is told by Athena that he will lead the army of the Epigonoι to conquer Thebes but not that he, alone of the leaders, will not return alive.²⁰ The most striking case of all, though, is *Trojan Women*, in which victorious Greeks and captive Trojan women go to the homeward-bound ships unaware that Athena and Poseidon have already agreed to wreck the fleet; even Cassandra, who knows almost every detail of Odysseus' future wanderings (*Tro.* 431–48), is not allowed to foretell this disaster.

In *Seven*, as in *Ajax*, the dark future appears to have been *known* to the audience but only *feared* by those within the action (in this case the chorus, who after the departure of the messenger are the only *dramatis personae* who have a voice). After giving expression to that fear, they mourn only for the two brothers; but the depth of their grieving could well have been described, changing only the name of the city, in the words Homer uses when speaking of the Trojans' grief on witnessing the death of Hector and the maltreatment of his body:

It was very like what it would have been if all of beetling Ilios were smouldering in fire from top to bottom.

(*Iliad* 22.410–11)

One day, not too far in the mythological future, Thebes will burn like that. Then the consequences of 'the disobedient decision of Laius' (*Seven* 842) will have finally worked themselves out. In the meantime, that decision has already been fatal to Laius himself, to Eteocles and Polynices, to the rest of the *Seven*, to at least two more of the champions who opposed them (Melanippus and Megareus, who according to the common story did not survive the battle,²¹ and whose death is significantly envisaged as a possibility in *Seven* 419–21 and 477), to countless ordinary soldiers on both sides (*Seven* 922–5), and presumably also to Oedipus' mother-wife – as well as to the eyes (though not, so far as we know, to the life) of Oedipus himself. None of those who featured, on or off stage, in the three plays of the Theban trilogy will have lived to see the fall of Thebes, with two exceptions. One is Adrastus, who will lose his son. The other, a collective character, is the

chorus of unmarried Theban girls, who will be wives and mothers when Thebes is destroyed. According to the only full narrative we have ([Apoll.] 3.7.3–4), which may well derive from the epic *Epigonoí*, they will not have to endure or witness the scenes they described in anticipation in *Seven* 287–368: the Thebans evacuated their city after their defeat in battle and the death of their king, leaving a deserted town to be entered, sacked, and burnt by the victors. They will not, as they feared, become captive concubines; but they will become homeless refugees. Laius was given a choice between the end of his family and the end of his city. He made the wrong choice; and the result was the end of both.

Notes

- 1 West 2003:9–10, 54–9, Cingano 2015.
- 2 West 2003:10–1, 59–63, Debiasi 2015. On Pindar's representation of Alcmaeon and Amphiaraus as an intertextual response to Aeschylus' *Seven*, see Foster in this volume.
- 3 Details in Gantz 1993:497–8.
- 4 I see no reason to hold, with Garvie 2014:24–5, that the oracle as reported in 748–9 *unambiguously* states that 'if Laius had a son Thebes would be destroyed'. If that, and that alone, was what Aeschylus wanted us to understand the oracle as meaning, he had ways of making this clear; he chose not to adopt them.
- 5 So e.g. Hutchinson 1985:167, 187, 195–6, Gantz 1993:523, Conacher 1996:72–4, Sommerstein 2010a:94n.20.
- 6 See Dawe 1967, 1978, Taplin 1977:169–91, Sommerstein 2010a:90–3.
- 7 For ἐλεῖν in the sense 'kill' see LSJ αἰρέω A.II. In *Agamemnon* (689–90) Helen is punningly called ἐλένας, ἑλανδρος, ἐλέπτολις: she may have caused the *capture* of a city, but she caused the *destruction* of ships (in the storm on the homeward voyage, of which we heard in 650–70) and the *death* of many men.
- 8 Details in Gantz 1993:513–14.
- 9 Details in Gantz 1993:523–4.
- 10 The points made in this and the preceding sentence are ignored in the discussion of this passage by Garvie 2014:30–1.
- 11 The following analysis is in broad agreement with that of Garvie 2014:26–9.
- 12 In *Ant.* 858 μέριμνας means 'thought' as usual; the idea of grief is brought in by the powerful adjective ἀλγεινοτάτας 'most painful'. The earliest passage in which μέριμνα itself seems to mean 'grief' is Eur. *Ion* 244. As to the three passages in which Hutchinson claims that μέριμνα refers to an *expression* of grief: in Bacchylides 19.11 the poet apostrophizes the 'much-praised Cean mind' (εὐαίνετε Κηϊά μέριμνα) and bids it weave a new song in Athens: the μέριμνα, that is, is not the song but the mental processes of its maker. In Eur. *Hipp.* 1428–9 Artemis promises Hippolytus that there will always be songs sung by maiden choruses (μουσοποιός . . . παρθένων . . . μέριμνα) in his honour; here again, μέριμνα can denote not the songs themselves but the mental effort that goes into performing them well. In [Eur.] *Rhes.* 548–50 ὕμνεϊ . . . παιδολέτωρ μελοποιὸν ἀηδονίς μέριμναν the word does seem to denote the actual song of the 'child-killing nightingale' (though Liapis 2012 ad loc. renders 'puts into song her music-making cares'), but the phrase is probably a slightly inaccurate imitation of the *Hippolytus* passage.
- 13 Though Hutchinson reasonably cites, as a parallel for the sense of ἀμφοῖ that he favours, *Iliad* 11.706–7 where the Pylians make sacrifices ἀμφοῖ . . . ἅστω, i.e. on all or many of the city's altars.
- 14 Such in effect is also the conclusion – reached by a somewhat different route – of Garvie 2014.

- 15 Some editors (e.g. Brown 1987) have adopted a nineteenth-century proposal to delete lines 1080–3; the passage is strongly defended by Griffith 1999. Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990:143–4, contrariwise, suggest that something has been lost between 1080 and 1081. See now the powerful arguments of Brown 2016 for deleting the passage.
- 16 Polynices claimed that Dike (Justice) was bringing him home (642–8), and the virtuous Amphiaras does not dispute this but only says that no cause however just can excuse an attack on one's motherland (584–6).
- 17 See Garvie 2014:33–6.
- 18 See March 1987:72–7, Holt 1989, Finkelberg 1996:139–41, Hahnemann 1999. To fifth-century Athenians Heracles was a god, and he appears to have described his own apotheosis from the pyre in Aeschylus' *Heracleidae* (fr. 73b, 75a). If Sophocles wished us to forget about it, it was extremely careless of him to mention three times (76–81, 164–8, 1164–73), and probably to invent, an oracle according to which Heracles, at a certain time which has now arrived, would *either die or* have for the future a *life* (βίος, βίωτος) that was happy (81) and free from grief (168) – which, proverbially, no mortal could have, only a god. Heracles himself, to be sure, takes 'freedom from grief' itself to mean death (1172–3); but he reaches this interpretation by suppressing the fact that the oracle treated freedom from grief as an *alternative* to death (he reports it not as an 'either/or' but as a single prediction without alternatives) and also suppressing the word 'life'.
- 19 Jebb (1894:xxxii) famously asserted that for Sophocles 'the deed of Orestes is simply laudable, and therefore final' and that we are not meant to think of an impending pursuit by the Erinyes as in Aeschylus and Euripides; Sheppard 1927 argued otherwise, and the matter has been debated ever since. Finglass 2011:8–10, 525–8 argues that while Sophocles has not encouraged us to envisage an intervention by the Erinyes (or any other *specific* continuation of the story), he has also 'deliberately eschewed any attempts at a satisfying conclusion which ties up all loose ends' and left us feeling strongly that 'all is not well within the house'.
- 20 See e.g. [Apoll.] *Bibl.* 3.7.3; Sommerstein 2012:26–7.
- 21 Melanippus: Pherecydes fr. 97 Fowler, [Apoll.] *Bibl.* 3.6.8. Megareus is not elsewhere named in connection with the battle, but Soph. *Ant.* 1303 implies that there was a well-known story that he perished before or during it (and that his father Creon was somehow responsible for this).

In some ways, the premise of the *Antigone* is the same as that of the *Seven*: the city is not safe while the accursed family of the Labdacids survives; rejoicing over the city's salvation gives way to mourning. In *Antigone*, it emerges that the troubles of

this family and the troubles that it has brought on the city are not over. We can see the fate and conduct of *Antigone* as in some ways a continuation of the pattern that has obtained at previous stages of the myth; and we can see the tragedy of *Creon* as the extension of that pattern *via* the collateral line.⁴ In a somewhat Aeschylean manner, both *Antigone* and *Creon* are caught up in a nexus of causation that is greater than themselves and their choices; and yet each is said to be responsible for his/her fate – *Antigone* descends *autonomos* to Hades (821), a law unto herself, destroyed by her αὐτόγνωτος ὄργῃ ('self-resolved passion', 875); a god may have struck *Creon* on the head, shaken him in savage roads (1272–4), but still he erred his own ruin, no one else's (1259–60).

If the *Antigone* is a major stage in the reception of the *Seven*, then the reception of the *Antigone* itself continues that process. This, in part, is my justification for writing about Brecht in this volume. But the relevance is not completely spurious: one of the ways in which Brecht's *Antigone* fascinates as a version is that the external conditions of its realization mirror, in a way that is not directly true of either *Seven* or *Antigone*, the circumstances that the two ancient plays dramatize – it is an immediate post-war reflection on the causes and consequences of war, and especially on the threat to civilization that war represents. And so one of the things that Brecht's play does is to enact the threat that hangs over *Seven* and remains present in *Antigone* – the destruction of Thebes itself.

Brecht's play was written in a period of less than a fortnight towards the end of 1947 and first performed, after a month's rehearsal, in the small town of Chur in Switzerland on 15 February 1948.⁵ Brecht first went into exile in 1933. In 1947, he had just returned from six years in the US. On 30 October 1947, he appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities; he left for Europe the day after. Unable to return to Germany, he took up residence in Zurich, where the plan arose to produce a version of *Antigone* for the municipal theatre in Chur. On the advice of his friend and set designer, Caspar Neher, Brecht chose to adapt Hölderlin's 1804 translation,⁶ first performed in 1919, relishing not only its 'Swabian accents and grammar-school Latin constructions' but also its strangeness and obscurity.⁷ On one calculation, Brecht has left around half of Hölderlin's lines entirely or almost entirely as he found them, while substantially revising or omitting the rest.⁸ His own additions, after the style of Hölderlin, though occasionally even more archaizing and obscure, are considerable. The result is a transformation of Hölderlin and a further departure from Sophocles.⁹

As it incorporates and transforms Hölderlin, so Brecht's version also appropriates and purports to 'rationalize' Sophocles, uncovering what Brecht regards as 'the underlying popular legend' beneath all the supposed accretions of fate and religion, yet still drawing on the 'barbarism' he sees as characteristic of Greek tragedy.¹⁰ Sophocles exists in Brecht's adaptation both as a classic and as a model from which modern tragedy must distance itself. Hölderlin's affinity for what he saw as the 'Oriental' in Greek tragedy serves Brecht's purpose,¹¹ but his use of Hölderlin's text may also have had the advantage of allowing him to help recuperate a radical, revolutionary strand of German philhellenism from its association with Nazism.¹² This was to be Brecht's return to the

German-speaking theatre and a chance to develop and apply his theories of epic theatre:¹³ his aspirations for the work as a model for a new kind of tragedy emerge clearly from the way that he developed its staging and production into the first of his *Modellbücher*, devised by himself and Neher and published with photographs by Ruth Berlau in 1949.¹⁴

The persistence of the 'barbaric' is signalled, in the 1948 production, in the staging. The acting took place within a space demarcated by four posts or totem poles, each holding a suspended horse's skull (see Fig. 10.1). Brecht and Neher had originally thought that these posts should be used to separate the actors' benches (like the actors themselves, and their props, in full view of the audience throughout) from the acting area, representing 'a visible separation of the original poem and its secularised version'. Using them to define the area in which the entire action is played out was intended to demonstrate that 'we are still living in the totemic state of the class war': '*Antigone* in its entirety belongs with the barbaric horses' skulls.'¹⁵ Further ritualizing elements, such as the use of masks, reinforce this impression, but this is not gratuitous primitivism. The primitive or ritual elements serve epic theatre's insistence on the story's significance for society: 'the audience must not be able to think that it has been transported to the scene of the story, but must be invited to take part in the delivery of an ancient poem'.¹⁶

The 1948 production in Chur began with a Prelude set in Berlin, April 1945. Two sisters return home from the air-raid shelter to find the signs of their brother's return from the front. But the brother has deserted, and when the sisters leave for



Figure 10.1 Brecht's *Antigone* (1948) with horses' skulls atop totem poles.

work, they find him hanging outside from a meat hook. One sister prepares to cut him down, while the other attempts to dissuade her. At that point, an SS man appears and questions the sisters about their connection to 'the traitor'. The first denies all knowledge, but the other is still holding the knife. The scene ends with a question (p. 7):¹⁷

FIRST SISTER: Then I looked at my sister.
Should she on pain of death go now
And free our brother who
May be dead or no?

This sets the tone for the subsequent adaptation in many ways. First, there is the mixture of direct *mimesis* with narrative – the first sister both acts out the scene with the second sister and narrates it for the audience, a characteristic of Brecht's epic theatre.¹⁸ More importantly, the audience is encouraged to recognize, but also to question, a relation between the legendary heroism of Antigone and the horrific realities of the recent past. Will the second sister act? Should she? And what would it mean, in the context of Berlin in 1945, if she did?¹⁹

Already in the Prelude, the differences between Sophocles' vision and Brecht's are apparent. Where Sophocles' Creon makes an example only of Polynices, in Brecht's Prelude the hanged brother is only one victim among many – in response to a scream from outside their door the first sister assumes that 'Again they are tormenting folk for pleasure' (p. 5). The second sister wants to investigate, but the first is afraid: 'You go and find out, you get found out too' (p. 6). And so they do not go. But this is the second such cry that they have failed to investigate; the first was also ignored, on the first sister's advice: 'you go and see, you get seen too' (p. 4). In Sophocles, Creon is an untried ruler, new to power, following a decisive victory in a major conflict against external invaders. His repression begins with his edict against the burial of Polynices. Here in Brecht's Prelude, the sisters are exhausted by years of factory work in a war of aggression that is nearing its conclusion of utter defeat for their nation. State oppression is long standing and generalized; 'they' torture people for the pleasure of it. And the pragmatic, safety-first counsels of the first sister have clearly become second nature, part of a strategy for survival. So, when the second sister's moment of decision comes, she has already twice accepted reassurances that the chilling cries from outside were nothing to do with her; only when she sees that her own brother has been a victim does she pick up the knife.

The implications of this scene are then played out in the adaptation proper. Eteocles and Polynices have been fighting on the same side in an aggressive war, initiated by Creon himself (pp. 22, 41, 44), for 'the grey metal' of Argos (p. 10) – the importance of Argos' mineral wealth as a motive for the Theban invasion is a central theme (see especially pp. 43–4). Eteocles 'did not fear the fight' (p. 10) and is treated as a hero; Polynices is not to be buried because he deserted (pp. 10, 14, 22). In this version, Polynices is a traitor only in so far as he is, in Creon's view, a coward; he is killed not by Eteocles but by Creon himself (pp. 25, 30, 41, 46),

and the motive for his desertion is the meaningless loss of his brother in a war of Creon's devising (as Tiresias makes clear, p. 41):

... you struck him down and left him graveless
When he rose up opposing you because
Your war lost him his brother Eteocles.

This in turn, we later learn, triggered a more extensive rebellion in the army, which Creon put down by hanging 'in public the many in the army | This aggrieved' (p. 46).

Though the Elders (i.e. the Chorus) still sing a victory song on entering the stage (p. 12), and Creon encourages them to exult in Thebes' 'total' victory over Argos, over the mutilation of *all* its exposed corpses (p. 13), the war is not in fact over: the role of Tiresias, in this version, is not to warn Creon of his folly in exposing Polynices and burying Antigone alive but to expose Creon's assurances that the war is won (pp. 13, 31, 41) for the lies that they are (pp. 38, 41–2). Creon needs to deceive as well as to oppress his people; he is a threat to the city's safety in a much more generalized and pervasive way than Sophocles' Creon is.²⁰

In response to Tiresias' revelations, Creon admits to the Elders that the war is not over and is not going well, even though he locates the reason for this in the opposition of Polynices and Antigone (pp. 42–3). Final victory, however, is assured, and when it comes, Creon affirms, his elder son, Megareus, will return to stamp out opposition at home (p. 45).²¹ But Megareus, a Messenger immediately reports, is dead, having failed to secure the allegiance of an army widely disaffected by Creon's treatment of Polynices (pp. 45–6). With an Argive invasion imminent, Creon places all his hopes in Haemon (p. 47), so that his attempt to release Antigone is merely an expedient to secure his surviving son's compliance. But Haemon kills himself over Antigone's corpse. Creon laments his son's death, but only in so far as he was to be the 'sword' who would save Thebes (p. 50). There is no Eurydice in this version, and no sympathy for a Creon who finally departs to await his own downfall and that of his city (p. 50):

See what I have here. It is the cloak. I thought
It might have been a sword I went to fetch. The
Child died on me early. One more battle
And Argos would be in the dust. But all
The bravery and uttermost that was mustered
Was only against me.
So now Thebes falls.
And let it fall, let it be with me, let it be finished
And there for the vultures. That is my wish now.

Brecht's 'rationalization' of the Sophoclean original shows itself chiefly in the reduction of the religious element. In their confrontation, it is Creon who invokes the divine, not Antigone. She instead contrives a contrast between Creon's divinely ordered state and a humane one (p. 25).²²

- CREON*: Always all you see is the nose in front of you. The state's Order, that is from God, you do not see.
- ANTIGONE*: From God it may be but I'd rather have it Human and humane, Creon, Menoeceus' son.

Just so, Tiresias' intervention is decisive not because his seercraft enables him to read the signs that show how the exposure of Polynices' body has disturbed the natural order but because he can see 'what any child can see', that since preparations are clearly being made for future campaigns, the war is not yet over (p. 41).²³ The same impetus also drives Brecht's rewriting of the choral odes, in which only one divinity, Bacchus, is important; the focus of the citizens' premature victory celebrations, the god is also patron of the drunken festivity that blinds them to the reality of their situation. 'These choruses,' Brecht wrote in his notes to the 1951 production, 'will scarcely be able to be fully understood at one hearing.'²⁴ This is especially true of Brecht's version of the second *stasimon*, in which he 'alludes' to a myth – of the 'sons of Lachmeus' who 'arise and slaughter all their tormentors' only when Pelias enters among them – that is entirely of his own invention.²⁵ This may be an ironic commentary on the difficulty and obscurity of aspects of Sophocles' original odes, particularly the myth of Cleopatra in the fourth *stasimon* (966–87), or a desire to out-Hölderlin Hölderlin.²⁶ In any event, Brecht has clearly given the reworking of the odes some thought: he does not, for example, adapt the *parodos* in full but deploys part of it in its original place, as the entrance song of the chorus of Elders (p. 12; cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 148–54) while relocating the original Chorus' vivid description of the Argive threat (Sophocles, *Antigone* 117–22) to a point after the Messenger's revelation that Megareus is dead and the Argives are invading, in what is otherwise an adaptation of the fifth *stasimon* (p. 49) – the relocation of the passage to presage the doom and not the deliverance of Thebes underlines the difference between Sophocles' conception of the war and Brecht's.

In Brecht's version, *Antigone* is not the only rebel – Polynices' desertion was also an act of rebellion (p. 41), whose suppression served only to alienate others; their opposition, in turn, required further exemplary punishment (p. 46). Non-burial is not only the fate of Polynices but one that Creon originally envisages for the Argive enemy (p. 13) before it finally comes to threaten the Thebans themselves (p. 37). As in Sophocles, *Antigone* appeals to the Elders for support in the course of her central *agōn* with Creon (p. 22):

But I appeal to you to help me in my trouble
And help yourselves, so doing. Who seeks power
Drinks of a salty water, he cannot desist but must
Drink it and drink it. My brother yesterday, today it's me.

The Elders remain silent at that point, but after Tiresias' revelation that the war is not in fact won, they too turn against Creon, condemning his 'double war' against internal and external enemies, vindicating *Antigone*'s 'right to bring home her

brother', and demanding that he bring the troops home (pp. 44–5). Their reference to popular opposition to Creon's regime (p. 43) is one of several that go beyond Sophocles' play in substantiating Haemon's assertion that Antigone's stance has widespread popular support.²⁷ For Brecht's Haemon, those among the populace who oppose Creon fear that they will become the victims of his violence now that the war is (supposedly) won (p. 31). This is not only a fear that is shared by the Chorus (above) but one that is borne out by Creon's own threat that he will call upon Megareus violently to put down all internal opposition once he has achieved final victory against Argos (p. 45). Brecht's attitude towards Creon is thus clear enough, even without the Guard's salutation *mein Führer* (retained in the translation, p. 15) or the repeated references to Thebes' 'stormtroops'. The Prelude in itself sets up an analogy between Creon's wish that Thebes be destroyed with him (p. 50, quoted earlier) and the last days of Hitler; the failure of his aggression against Argos and the immediate turn in the tide of the war that this entails turns Argos into Stalingrad.²⁸

Brecht's attitude towards Antigone and towards the significance of her opposition is less clear. The 1947 Prelude suggests that Antigone's choice and the possibility of making a similar choice in the circumstances of Berlin in April 1945 is to be the focus of the drama that follows; but both in his various writings about the play and in the play itself Brecht's stance with regard to Antigone's resistance is ambivalent. In the various paratexts that accompany the 1947 and 1951 productions there are certainly plenty of signs of a familiar presentation of Antigone's heroism: in the (unused) draft foreword to the play, written in 1947, Brecht affirms that 'Sophocles' *Antigone* is the decided rejection of tyranny in favour of democracy';²⁹ the programme which accompanied the Chur production in 1948 contained the following poem, entitled 'Antigone':³⁰

Come out from the shadows and walk
 Before us a while
 Friendly girl with the light step
 Of one who has made up her mind, a terror
 To the terrible.
 Girl turning away, I know
 You were afraid of dying but
 Still more afraid
 Of living unworthily.
 And you let the powerful off
 Nothing and with those confusing the issue
 You did no deals nor ever
 Forgot an insult and over wrongdoing
 There was no covering up.
 We salute you.

In the later *Modellbuch*, however, Brecht emphasizes that 'the great character of the resister in the old play does not represent the German resistance fighters who necessarily seem most important to us' and that 'the really remarkable

element in this *Antigone* play' is 'the role of force in the collapse of the head of state'; the prelude presents the issue purely from a subjective point of view, but the play that follows focuses on 'objective' issues of power and the state, a focus that (according to Brecht) is able to emerge precisely because 'the old play was historically so remote as to tempt nobody to identify himself with its principal figure'.³¹

This emphasis on the state and its use of force recurs in the Notes to the 1951 production in Greiz; here, it is the link between external aggression and internal repression that causes 'the part of the ruling house that is in sympathy with the people' to revolt; 'Antigone rebels against the tyrant Creon, and the great morality of her act consists in this: that, moved by a deep humanity, in an act of open resistance, she does not hesitate to put her own people in danger of being defeated in a war of aggression.'³² For that production, the 1948 Prelude was, after the opening night, replaced by a new Prologue in verse. This ended as follows:

And now
You will see us and the other actors
Entering in turn the small space of the play
Where formerly among
The skulls of the sacrificial beasts of a barbarous cult
In very ancient times humanity
Stood up tall.

But it also contains this characterization of Antigone's role:

But his war, that now has the name of an inhuman war
Collapses on him. Just and unbending
Not heeding her tyrannised country's sacrifices
She ended it. We beg you
Search in your own hearts and minds for similar deeds
In the recent past or for the absence
Of any such deeds.³³

On these interpretations, Antigone's action is an admirable act of resistance, a blow for humanity, but also limited; if it achieves the downfall of the tyrant, putting an end to his violence towards external and internal enemies, it also contributes to the defeat of the entire nation. And it represents a ruling class divided against itself. These judgements are not a matter of chronological development in Brecht's interpretation of the play but instantiate a point of view that he held from the project's inception: in a journal entry for 10 April 1948 Brecht bristles at those who regard his *Antigone* as 'a moral play',³⁴ he had intended it to show

nothing more (or less) than that enterprises that need too much violence readily fail. This amounts to no more than saying that impractical enterprises are impractical, and would be pretty banal, if it did not give an insight into a special sort of violence, namely the sort which derives from inadequacy, so

that violence is seen to derive from stupidity. This brings the moral and the practical together.³⁵

Antigone's act is therefore part of a bigger picture; Brecht prefers to focus not on Creon but on what Creon represents.

This interpretation emerges also in the text of the adaptation itself. Throughout, there is emphasis on the complicity of those who have acquiesced in Creon's rule and Creon's war. This includes the chorus of Elders, whose entrance song hails not 'the big name of victory' (*der großnamige Sieg*), as in Hölderlin (Sophocles' *μεγαλόνυμος Νίκᾱ*), but 'victory big in booty' (*der großbeutige Sieg*, p. 12). They are accordingly dismayed to learn from Tiresias that the war is not in fact over and that there will be no 'booty coming | With bronze and fish from Argos now' (p. 41). They supported Creon, they say (p. 43), while he maintained order in Thebes and 'kept off our throats | Our enemies', the 'rapacious populace'. Now that their own positions are threatened, they fear popular unrest and distance themselves from Creon (p. 43). For his part, he points out that they were fully behind his aggressive war for the mineral wealth of Argos (pp. 43–4); indignant 'if the loot is late', they 'eat the meats but | Don't like the bloody aprons of the cooks' (pp. 44–5).

Similarly, Antigone, who had appealed in vain for the Elders' support, in Brecht's version of her *agōn* with Creon (p. 22, quoted earlier), later, when she is making her final exit, denounces them for their complicity in Creon's war (pp. 36–7):

For do not think
Unhappy souls, you will be saved.
Other bodies, hacked
Will lie in heaps unburied around
That one unburied. You having dragged the war
For Creon over zones beyond our homeland
However many battles he is lucky in, the last
Will swallow you up. Calling for spoils
It won't be chariots full you see coming but
Empty.

But according to the Elders, she too is complicit (pp. 37–8):

But she also once
Ate of the bread that was baked
In the stony dark. And while unhappiness
Harboured in the towers
In their shadow she sat at ease until
The deadly things that went forth from Labdacus' home
Returned deadly. The bloody hand
Dealt them among its own and they
Did more than receive, they grabbed at it.
Only after that did she
Lie angrily in the open air and was also
Flung into the good!

The cold woke her.
Not until the last
Patience was consumed and measured out the last
Criminal act, did the child of unseeing Oedipus
Remove the long since threadbare blindfold from her eyes
To look into the abyss.³⁶

All the play's major characters, in fact, belong to a class that is implicated in Creon's war of aggression.³⁷ A perspective on this is provided by the Guard, who wants nothing to do with disputes among the elite: attributing the burial of Polynices to the 'high-up friends' of the 'high-up dead man', he counts himself lucky to be able to escape with his life from a place 'where the high | Are scrapping with the mighty' (p. 17). Seen in the terms in which the Elders present it, Antigone's act mirrors not the opposition of Hitler's inveterate opponents among the German resistance but something more like the conspiracy of July 1944, led by the aristocratic Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg – not a Brechtian role model.³⁸

Creon is ultimately unconcerned for the fate of his city or its people. Already in his opening speech, he put the city as an abstract entity before the lives of its inhabitants (p. 14):

For who rates higher than his native city
His life, I count him nothing.³⁹

By the end of the play he has no concern for the city either (p. 50, quoted earlier). But Antigone, too, is sanguine about the city's destruction. Creon argues that her opposition amounts to support for the enemy (p. 24):

But she does not want
The people of Thebes to be seated in the houses of Argos. She
Would rather see Thebes broken and beaten.

To which she replies:

Better we'd be sitting in the ruins of our own city
And safer too than with you
In the enemy's houses.

This idea returns in the coda with which the Elders close the play (p. 51):

But she who saw everything
Could help nobody but the enemy who now
Is coming and quickly will wipe us out. For time is short
And disaster all around and never enough of time
To live on thoughtlessly and easily
From compliance to crime and
Become wise in old age.⁴⁰

Ultimate responsibility for the city's ruin lies with Creon; but in turning against Creon long after his pursuit of power had become detrimental to the city, Antigone, in this version, does nothing to avert its downfall and may even be thought to hasten it.

The consequences of her action are more symbolic than practical. This is one reason why she herself refers to her act only as a kind of gesture: the Elders ask her why, in the face of Creon's encouragement to repudiate her act, she remains obstinate, and she replies (p. 21), 'For an example.' Brecht's Creon, like Anouilh's, appreciates the symbolism and publicity value of Antigone's act.⁴¹ Like Anouilh's, he too expands the window of opportunity that is perhaps, momentarily, just about there in the Sophoclean original – Antigone can escape punishment if she publicly repudiates what she did in secret.⁴² But for Brecht's Antigone, the public, exemplary quality of the act is its *raison d'être*.

This does not mean that it is without consequence: after Antigone, Haemon, Tiresias, and finally the Elders join Polynices and his fellow soldiers in turning against Creon; and surely it is better to turn against such a figure, even if late, than never to do so. Nor does it mean that there is no justice in the charges that Antigone and others make against Creon's rule: in pointing out that Creon's emphasis on state security needs internal enemies as much as external, Antigone diagnoses the basic issue of the mutual entailment of internal and external violence (p. 23):

ANTIGONE: Screaming for unity you live on discord.

CREON: So first in discord here and then in the field against Argos!

ANTIGONE: Of course. Exactly. When you have need of violence abroad
Then you'll have need of violence at home.

She also highlights the cost, in terms of young men's lives, of such policies (pp. 23–4). To Creon's defence of a state order, an order 'that is from God', Antigone (as we saw) opposes an ideal of a state that is 'human and humane' (p. 25). But she cannot avert the catastrophe. Her exemplary gesture may be admirable, but it comes too late. Her resistance makes her a martyr, an exemplary figure, but it also makes her paradigmatically a victim, symbolized in the original production by the fact that she is bound to a door from the point at which she is led in, under arrest (Fig. 10.2).⁴³

Antigone's gesture becomes one of the means by which the self-destructive potential of Creon's thirst for power is realized. In terms of Brecht's own antithesis (above), her stance may be 'moral', but it is not 'practical'. Brecht undercuts the exemplarity of the grand moral gesture by emphasizing its practical consequences and pointing out its subjectivity and self-referentiality. In doing so, he highlights the distinction between the internal divisions of the ruling class and the more fundamental, dialectical opposition between rulers and ruled.⁴⁴ Much of the focus here is on objective social factors: Creon is a symbol of the reciprocal relation between economic/industrial interests and the military and of the mutual entailment of external aggression and internal repression.⁴⁵ He represents a form of social and political organization that one should oppose absolutely, not just when one's own



Figure 10.2 Brecht's Antigone under arrest, bound to a door.

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interests are threatened, a system whose moral failings can be overcome only by practical steps to create a different kind of society.

But Creon is also a certain kind of human being – not only a representative of mankind's ambitions to master the natural environment but also someone whose exploitation of the environment and of his fellow human beings will be his own undoing. This is Brecht's particular perspective on Sophocles' 'Ode to Man', as he found it in Hölderlin (p. 18):⁴⁶

In all this he is boundless but
A measure is set.
For when he wants for an enemy
He rises up as his own. Like the bull's
He bows the neck of his fellowmen but these fellowmen
Rip out his guts. When he steps forth
He treads on his own kind, hard. By himself alone
His belly will never be filled but he builds a wall
Around what he owns and the wall
Must be torn down. The roof
Opened to the rain. Humanity
Weighs with him not a jot. Monstrous thereby
He becomes to himself.

According to Hellmut Flashar, it is Sophocles' *Antigone*, not Brecht's, that is the more topical play for contemporary audiences, more interesting in socio-political terms. In contrast to Sophocles' presentation of live issues such as the relation between leaders and led, civil disobedience, the place of religion in politics, and the dangers of human ingenuity, Brecht's emphasis on class struggle is supposedly now just a historical curiosity.⁴⁷ It is probably true that the original's potential to address a variety of different social and political circumstances is greater than that of Brecht's considerably more one-sided adaptation.⁴⁸ But Brecht's version is more than a simple allegory of the last days of Hitler or a vehicle for allegedly outmoded notions of class struggle; it has important things to say to us about the disconnect between rulers and ruled, about the multitude of sins that may be concealed behind appeals to state security, and about the ways in which the symbiosis between government and the military-industrial complex drives both external aggression and internal repression. These are issues that later versions of *Antigone* have also attempted to raise: the 1978 portmanteau film, *Deutschland im Herbst*, with contributions by such luminaries of the German New Wave as Alexander Kluge, Völker Schlöndorff, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, does so exceptionally well, drawing links between Sophocles' play, the National-Socialist past, and the Federal Republic's responses to the contemporary terrorism of the Red Army Faction.⁴⁹ Seamus Heaney's *Antigone* is perhaps less successful in highlighting the state of exception as it applies in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁵⁰ But no version raises these issues as forcefully as Brecht's. It is well overdue a revival, because the phenomena it targets are more relevant than ever.⁵¹

Notes

- 1 On the *Antigone's* *parodos* and the *Seven*, see Else 1976:35–40, Davidson 1983:41, 43–8, Dunn 2012:268–70, Rodighiero 2012:108; on the second *stasimon* and its specific debt to *Seven* 653ff., 720–91, 875–1004, see Else 1976:16–24, 28, esp. 16–8; cf. Bowra 1944:87, Ditmars 1992:77–9. Gagné 2013:373 is more sceptical.
- 2 I cite the OCT (Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990): the precise constitution of the text is immaterial for present purposes.
- 3 Cf. her recapitulation of the family's woes and her plea to Antigone not to add to them at *Ant.* 49–57.
- 4 See Cairns 2016:66–71, 88–92, 112–3.
- 5 See Brecht's journal entry for 16 December 1947 in Brecht 2003:197; on the rehearsal period, see Flashar 2009:182. The flurry of German-language productions in the immediate aftermath of World War II included one of Anouilh's play in German translation and several of Hölderlin's version, one (in Hamburg in 1946) involving Brecht's collaborator on the 1948 *Antigone*, Caspar Neher; see D. Constantine in Brecht 2003:219, Castellari 2004:156–8, Savage 2008:151, Flashar 2009:176–8. *Antigone* had, however, also been surprisingly popular under the Third Reich: see the list in Flashar 2009:164–8, 395n.23; cf. Castellari 2004:158n.49, Pöggeler 2004:112, Fischer-Lichte 2010:338, Fleming 2015:179n.4. Carl Orff began work on his operatic version of Hölderlin (n. 12 below) under the Nazis, funded by the regime (Attfield 2010:345).
- 6 For discussion (in English) of Hölderlin's versions of Sophocles (and their accompanying 'Notes'), see Harrison 1975:160–92, Steiner 1984:66–103, Billings 2014:189–21, Weber 2015; cf. (in German) Reinhardt 1960, Schadewaldt 1960, Pöggeler 2004:78–110.
- 7 See Brecht's journal, 16 December 1947 and 25 December 1947, in Brecht 2003:197–8, and his notes on the 1951 adaptation of the play, 2003:216; cf. Kuhn and Constantine, in Brecht 2003:221, Pöggeler 2004:13.
- 8 See Savage 2008:165.
- 9 See Kuhn and Constantine, in Brecht 2003:220–2, Flashar 2009:182–4. On the relation between Brecht's *Antigone* and Hölderlin's both in general and in detail, see Castellari 2004. Brecht's modifications of Hölderlin include some which render Sophocles' text more accurately (Castellari 2004:165–6) and the introduction of passages from Hölderlin's Pindar translations (Kuhn and Constantine in Brecht 2003:219, 222, Castellari 2004:159, 171–2, Flashar 2009:184, 398n.12). In what follows, I quote Constantine's translation (in Brecht 2003), which gives the lines of Hölderlin that survive in Brecht's version in the same form as they appear in Constantine's translation of Hölderlin (Constantine 2001).
- 10 See Brecht's journal entry for 18 January 1948 and his letter to his son, Stefan, of December 1947, in Brecht 2003:199, 201; cf. the *Antigone-model* (Brecht 2003:204), the journal entry for 16 December 1947 (Brecht 2003:197), and the notes on the play's 1951 first German production, in the small town of Greiz in the newly established DDR (Brecht 2003:215–16). On Brecht's 'rationalization' of the myth, see Philipsen 1998:6–8, 2001, Flashar 2009:182–3, 185 is more sceptical. See also Pöggeler 2004:179–80, Savage 2008:165–6.
- 11 See Reinhardt 1960:387; cf. Harrison 1975:160, Steiner 1984:73, Billings 2014:200, Weber 2015:103–4.
- 12 Hölderlin had been lionized by the Nazis (Savage 2008:5–8), and Brecht's attitude towards him had hitherto been (at best) ambivalent: see Castellari 2004:147–51. For Brecht's use of Hölderlin as an act of recuperation, see Taxidou 2008:245; cf. Castellari 2004:157 on Neher's 1946 Hamburg production. Hölderlin's text also provides the libretto for Carl Orff's 1949 operatic version, whose score and instrumentation sought to enhance its 'orientalizing' elements and for which Neher also designed the sets (see Steiner 1984:169–70, 215, Pöggeler 2004:11, 13, 79, 112–3, 175–9, Flashar 2009:188–93, Attfield 2010). Orff's conceptualization and Brecht's are compared by

- Flashar 2009:188, 193, who sees ‘political’ versus ‘apolitical’ or ‘ritualist’ adaptations as antithetical tendencies in the subsequent performance tradition, with the latter dominating, especially in Germany, until the 1960s.
- 13 Kuhn and Constantine in Brecht 2003:x, xii–xiii, Taxidou 2008.
 - 14 Brecht and Neher 1949. The text of the *Antigone-model* is translated in Brecht 2003; on its aspirations, see esp. 2003:209.
 - 15 Quotations from Brecht 2003:207 (*Antigone-model*), 198–9 (journal, 4 January 1948), 199 (journal, 18 January 1948).
 - 16 *Antigone-model*, in Brecht 2003:206–8.
 - 17 Page numbers are those of Brecht 2003.
 - 18 See e.g. Castellari 2004:154–5.
 - 19 This Prelude was omitted when the play was first performed in Germany in 1951, replaced (after the first performance on 18 November) by a brief verse prologue spoken by the actor playing Tiresias (Brecht 2003:218); but this, too, raises the play’s relevance to the recent past: see quotation on p. 193 above. On the two versions, see Kuhn and Constantine, in Brecht 2003:xiii, 219–20, Flashar 2009:186. On the interrogative character of the 1948 Prelude, see Savage 2008:160–4.
 - 20 Cf. Philipsen 2001:23, 35–9.
 - 21 The expanded role of Megareus in Brecht’s version builds on the reference at Soph. *Ant.* 1302–5, and is perhaps also indebted to the characterization of Menoeceus in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, though Brecht’s Megareus, unlike Euripides’ Menoeceus, never appears onstage.
 - 22 Cf. Philipsen 1998:14, 2001:40–1.
 - 23 Cf. Brecht’s note on the 1951 production, 2003:216.
 - 24 Brecht 2003:216; cf. the (somewhat misleading) summary of the odes on p. 217.
 - 25 See Kuhn and Constantine, in Brecht 2003:222, Flashar 2009:184, with p. 185 on similar obscurities.
 - 26 See Philipsen 1998:4–5 and n. 12.
 - 27 Soph. *Ant.* 693–700, 733; cf. Brecht’s Haemon at p. 29, with the Elders’ references to popular revolt at pp. 38 and 43.
 - 28 See Brecht’s own observation in his draft foreword to the 1947 production (2003:202): ‘Argos becomes a Stalingrad – the parallel is obvious.’
 - 29 Brecht 2003:201.
 - 30 Brecht 2003:202–3.
 - 31 *Antigone-model* 1948 in Brecht 2003:204. Cf. Savage 2008:156, Taxidou 2008:246; also Judith Malina in her translation of Brecht’s *Antigone*, 1990:vi.
 - 32 Brecht 2003:216.
 - 33 Brecht 2003:218.
 - 34 As did, for example, the review in *Der Spiegel* 9, 28 February 1948, p. 22.
 - 35 Brecht 2003:200.
 - 36 Cf. Brecht’s journal for 12 January 1948 (2003:199), the ‘bridge verses’ which he deployed in rehearsal for the 1948 production as printed as captions in the 1949 *Antigone-model* (2003:213), and his summary of the fourth chorus in his Notes to the 1951 production (2003:217).
 - 37 Cf. Philipsen 1998:9, 2001:40.
 - 38 Cf. Kuhn and Constantine in Brecht 2003:220.
 - 39 Where Hölderlin has ‘And who rates higher than his motherland | Some dearest thing of his own, I count him nothing’ (Constantine 2001:76). This is Hölderlin’s version of Soph. *Ant.* 182–3: καὶ μείζον’ ὅστις ἀντὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ πάτρας | φίλον νομίζει, τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω.
 - 40 On this as ‘A characteristic Brechtian corrigendum to Sophocles’, see Steiner 1984:173. Flashar 2009:184 notes that Brecht has taken the final line (‘Become wise in old age’ = ‘weise zu werden im Alter’) not from Hölderlin (‘Sie haben im Alter gelehrt, zu denken’ = ‘In old age they have taught us to think’, Constantine 2001), but from the 1839

version by Johann Jakob Donner, used in the celebrated production by Ludwig Tieck, with music by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, which premiered in Potsdam in 1841.

- 41 The first impulse of Anouilh's Creon, on hearing of the burial of Polynices' body, is to cover it up (Anouilh 2000:24–5), not to spare his niece (for he does not yet know that she is the perpetrator), but as a matter of news management, to avoid any impression that resistance to his regime exists. If the news does get out, he threatens, the Guards will be put to death. His later command to have the Guards held incommunicado until he has questioned Antigone (2000:31), and his suggestion to Antigone (2000:31), that as long as no one knows what she has done, they can simply forget about it, can be attributed to the same motive. His assurance that he will 'get rid of those three men' if Antigone returns to her room and conceals what she has done (2000:31) is chilling. Cf. p. 34: 'Now you go straight back to your room, do as I told you and say nothing. I'll see that everyone else keeps quiet.' For the idea that Brecht intended his *Antigone* as a riposte to Anouilh's, see Philippsen 2001:23, Castellari 2004:151n.34.
- 42 With Brecht 2003:21 cf. the long scene in Anouilh's *Antigone* in which Creon attempts to persuade – indeed to force – Antigone to save herself (2000:31–49). As Chancellor notes (1979:89), 'This is where Brecht and Anouilh meet.' Such hypotheses probably go back to Soph. *Ant.* 441–9, just before Antigone's outspoken defiance finally confirms Creon's resolve to condemn her.
- 43 See Taxidou 2008:251–4.
- 44 On the ambivalence of Antigone's 'example', cf. Savage 2008:170–1.
- 45 What Agamben (2005) calls the 'state of exception'. On the theme in Brecht, cf. Philippsen 2001:38–9.
- 46 Cf. Brecht's note on the 1951 version, 2003:217, with Steiner (1984:173). 'Monstrous' picks up the memorable beginning of Hölderlin's version of the first stasimon, '*Ungeheuer ist viel*' ('Monstrous, a lot', in Constantine's translation, Constantine 2001:81, Brecht 2003:17). For the first stasimon Brecht seems also to have made use of a fragment of an earlier version by Hölderlin (Castellari 2004:168–71).
- 47 Flashar 2009:187–8.
- 48 For the contrast between Brecht and Sophocles in these terms, cf. Ciani 2000:16, 18. Steiner 1984:186 refers to 'Brecht's vehement repudiation of the Hegelian defence of Creon'.
- 49 On the film and its contexts, see Hansen 1981–1982, Elsaesser 2004, Blumenthal-Barby 2007, Capeloa Gil 2010. There is also a discussion in Honig 2013:68–82.
- 50 Heaney 2004. See Wilmer 2007:235, 2010:386, 389–91.
- 51 Brecht's play has, of course, been influential, especially through the *Modellbuch*. It also had a substantial afterlife in its adaptation by Judith Malina (1990), premiered in Krefeld in 1967 and performed in sixteen countries in the twenty years thereafter by the New York Living Theatre. See Guarino 2010.

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